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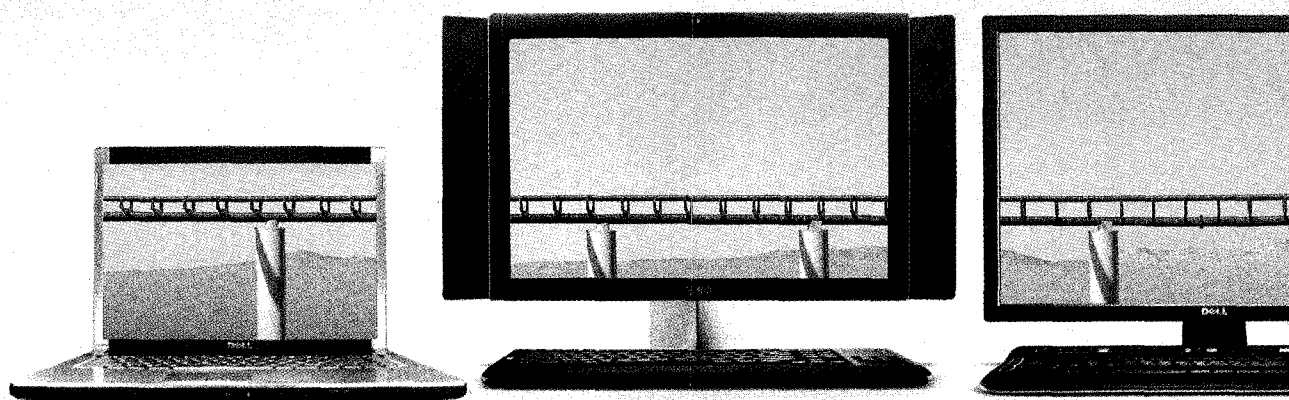
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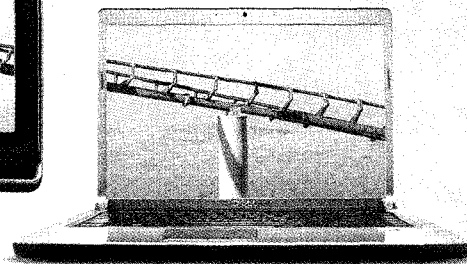
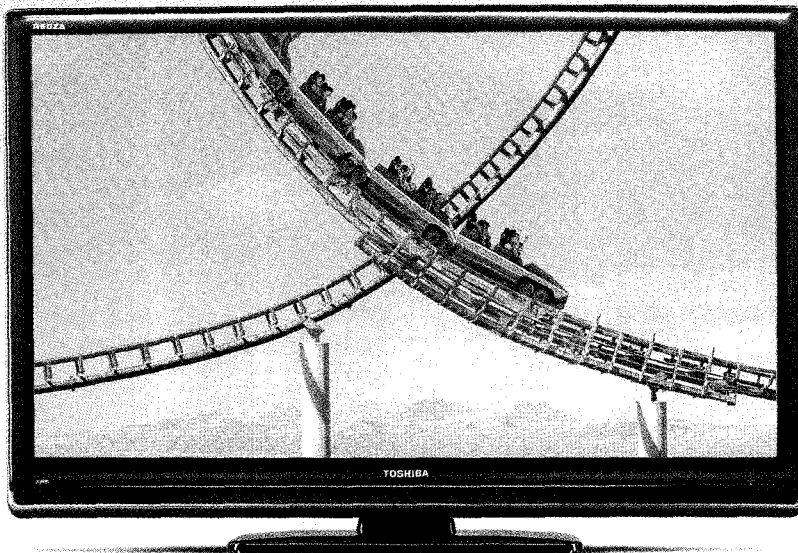




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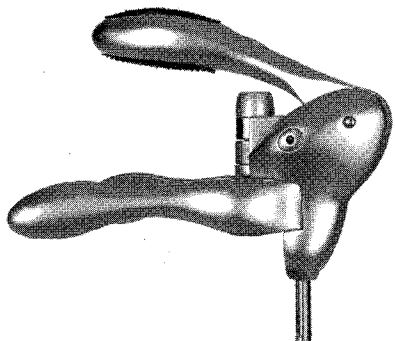
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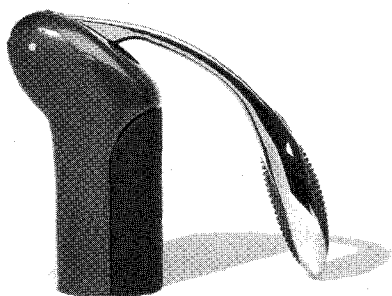
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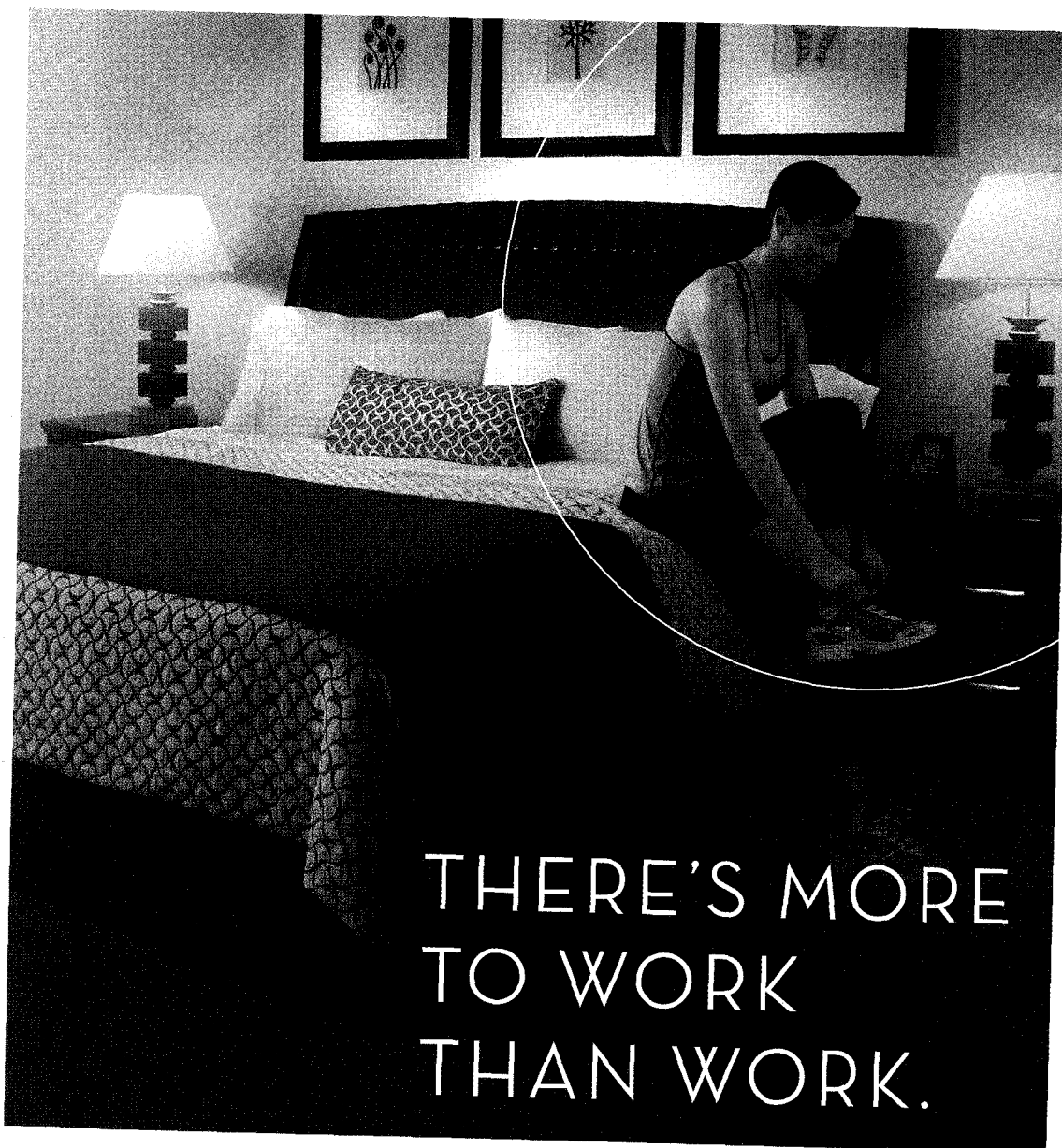
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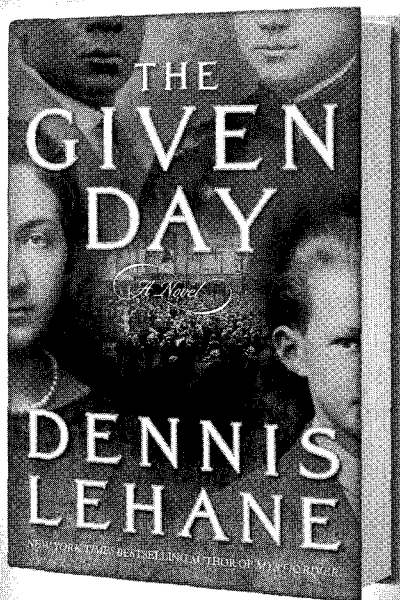
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CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Toobin ("Rich Bitch," p. 38) is a staff writer. His book *The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court* was awarded the 2008 J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize.

John Cassidy (Comment, p. 25), the author of *Dot.Con*, is currently working on a new book, entitled "How Markets Think."

Deborah Treisman (*The Talk of The Town*, p. 29) is the fiction editor of *The New Yorker*.

John le Carré ("The Madness of Spies," p. 32) has written twenty-one novels, including *A Most Wanted Man*, which will be published next month.

Andy Borowitz (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 37) is the creator of the satirical Web site BorowitzReport.com.

James Surowiecki (*The Financial Page*, p. 30) writes about economics, business, and finance in his biweekly column. His book *The Wisdom of Crowds* is available in paperback.

Eric Drooker (Cover) is the author of *Flood! A Novel in Pictures*, and *Slingshot*, a collection of political graphics from the mid-nineteen-eighties to the present.

William Finnegan ("The Last Tour," p. 64) has written four books, including *A Complicated War* and *Cold New World*.

Platon (*Portfolio*, p. 48), a staff photographer, received a first prize at the 2008 World Press Photo contest for his portrait of Vladimir Putin.

Andrea Lee (*Fiction*, p. 72), the author of *Lost Hearts in Italy*, is working on a collection of stories and a new novel. Her work is included in the anthology *State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America*, which has just been published.

John Ashbery (*Poem*, p. 75) has published more than twenty collections of poems, including *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror*, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize. *Notes from the Air: Selected Later Poems* comes out in paperback next month.

Louis Menand (*A Critic at Large*, p. 80) is a professor of English at Harvard. His books include *The Metaphysical Club* and *American Studies*.

David Denby (*The Current Cinema*, p. 94) is a film critic for the magazine and the author of *Great Books* and *American Sucker*.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

John Cassidy answers readers' questions about the market, and talks to Hendrik Hertzberg and Dorothy Wickenden on the Campaign Trail podcast. / Platon tells the stories behind his photographs, plus additional images of veterans and their families. / Primary Sources: Leona Helmsley's legacy. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, and blogs by Steve Coll, George Packer, and Sasha Frere-Jones. / From the archives: George Packer and Calvin Trillin on the war at home, and complete election coverage. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.



THE MAIL

ENGINEERED DESIGN

I was fortunate to lead a team of engineers who collaborated with Santiago Calatrava on the design of the Milwaukee Art Museum addition ("Winged Victories," by Rebecca Mead, September 1st). His skills as an architect are matched or exceeded by his genius as an engineer—for instance, his mechanism for the Brise Soleil is brilliantly simple, and works reliably with almost no maintenance—a mastery that inspires comparison to Leonardo da Vinci.

*John Kissinger
Wauwatosa, Wis.*

PALIN AND ABC

Steve Coll criticizes ABC News' interviews with Governor Sarah Palin because we provided them to the public as they were completed, rather than airing them on a "single night" (Comment, September 22nd). He is certainly entitled to his opinion, although it's not at all clear why a single session would have been better for the American voter or been better journalism. But Mr. Coll is not entitled to his own version of the truth about how the multiple interviews came to be. In Mr. Coll's view of the world, Governor Palin agreed to be interviewed by ABC News "[f]inally, after negotiations." Not true. Mr. Coll would have you believe we "collaborat[ed]" with what he describes as the McCain campaign's "decision to sequester Palin." Not true. And Mr. Coll has the odd view that the best way to "maximize ratings" is to split a big event into several pieces. Demonstrably not true. Sadly, Mr. Coll never asked about the circumstances leading to Governor Palin's interviews. If he had, he would have learned that there were no negotiations leading to the commitment to do the interview. We asked, and they accepted with only one condition: that the interview take place in Alaska. At no time did we "collaborate" with any decision to "sequester" Sarah Palin. We asked for as much time as we could get. To get the almost two hours we did, we sat with her twice and walked and talked with her twice, all over two days. We made all of this available immediately,

rather than holding it for a "single night" because it was newsworthy. And most often in television news, the "big event" garners more ratings by being just that—a single, big event. Based on his inaccurate reporting of the events leading up to the Palin interview, Mr. Coll draws broad conclusions about our difficulty in discerning the line between "news" and "entertainment." ABC News is proud that we make every effort to make sure what we report is true. That is an important part of what we understand reporting the news requires. Sadly, the same cannot be said of Mr. Coll or his publication in this case. So, which is "news" and which is "entertainment" in the end?

*David Westin
President, ABC News
New York City*

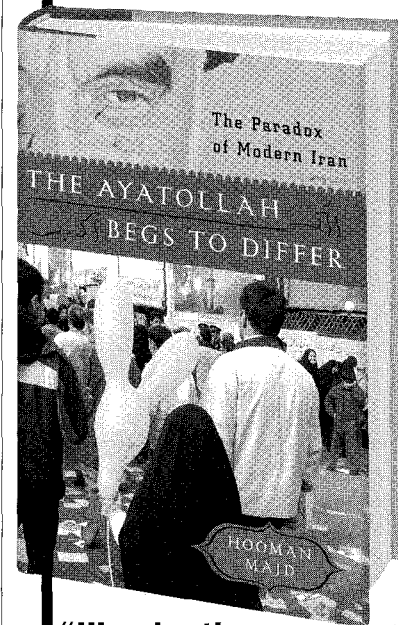
Steve Coll replies: I wrote that Mr. Westin split the interview "apparently to maximize ratings and branding opportunities" across multiple ABC platforms; the network's promotional campaign in this respect was self-evident. I wrote, "Finally, after negotiations, Palin agreed to receive Gibson in her home state." On September 8th, Jon Banner, the executive producer of "World News with Charles Gibson," was quoted in the blog TV Newser as saying, about the Palin interviews, "There were lots of negotiations in terms of what and when and how" and "no preconditions." ABC aired the first interview on the potent date of September 11th, and the day of her son's deployment ceremony. The network might have mitigated its choices by asking Palin why she had sequestered herself from the press for two weeks and then granted her first interview on the anniversary of the attacks. If such a question was asked and answered, it did not air. My conclusion that ABC's presentation of its Palin interview mixed entertainment value with news values remains.

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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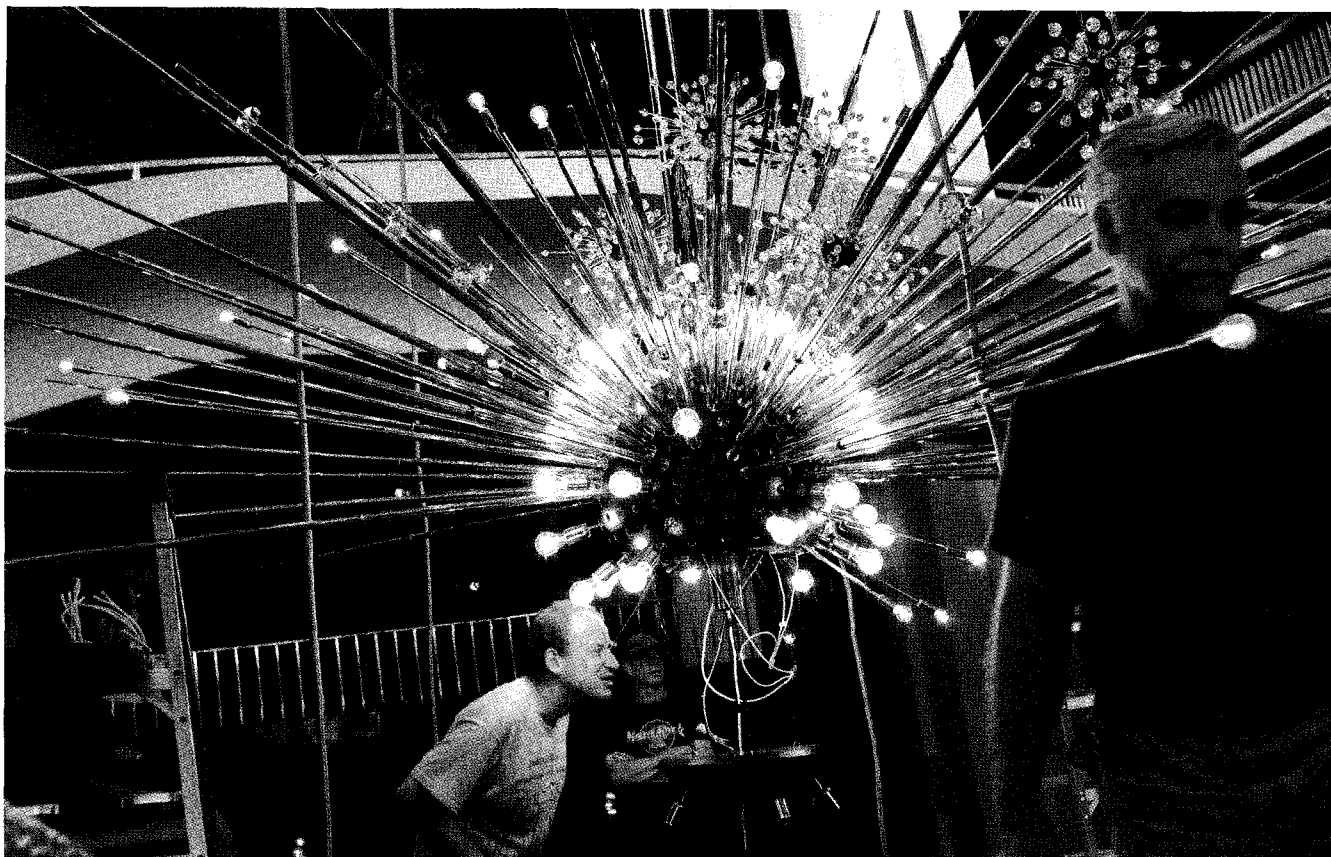
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pleasure to read."—GARY SICK, Ph.D.,
senior research scholar, Columbia University**



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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
28	29	30	24	25	26	27

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE QUEEN FOR A DAY

The young playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney had an auspicious Off Broadway debut last year, when the Public Theatre staged his drama "The Brothers Size." Now, the Vineyard presents his latest, "Wig Out!," about the testy, tumultuous world of drag-queen competitions. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE OLD-WORLD VOICE

The London-based Israeli vocalist Mor Karbasi sings in Ladino, Spanish, and

Hebrew, revitalizing Jewish songs from pre-Inquisition Spain with flamenco and North African influences. She makes an appearance during the World Music Institute's Sephardic Song Festival. (See page 13.)

ART SOCIAL STUDIES

The photographer Catherine Opie came to prominence in the nineties for color portraits that challenged notions of gender while adhering to the genre's formal conventions (think August Sander meets Hans Holbein on Castro Street).

The pictures are included in Opie's mid-career survey at the Guggenheim, alongside other series that focus on freeways, icehouses, surfers, and the artist's domestic life. (See page 14.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC MUCH ADO

Carnegie Hall's Bernstein Festival, celebrating what would have been the composer-conductor's ninetieth year, begins this week with concerts offered by both the San Francisco Symphony (on Carnegie's opening night) and the New York Philharmonic (at Avery Fisher Hall). (See page 17.)

MOVIES PARIS, TOKYO

Nagisa Oshima, who made his first film in 1959, was a one-man Japanese New Wave, finding provocative ways to connect sex, politics, and pop culture. A sidebar to the New York Film Festival offers twenty-six films, including the succès de scandale "In the Realm of the Senses" and "Max Mon Amour," in which Charlotte Rampling falls in love with a chimpanzee. (See page 21.)

The installation of the Metropolitan Opera's newly renovated chandeliers. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK STILL LIVES

It takes a while to acclimate oneself to "Silent Light," the most remarkable film to date from the Mexican director Carlos Reygadas. At first, neither period nor location is easy to fix: where and when are Johan (Cornelio Wall Fehr) and



his wife, Esther (Miriam Toews), serving breakfast to their brood of children? Are they nineteenth-century farmers? They are, in fact, Old Colony Mennonites living in modern Mexico, and their sparse dialogue is in Plautdietsch, a form of Low German. Johan burns with love for another woman, Marianne (Maria Pankratz), and he cannot bring himself to douse the flame; their illicit bond is, as a friend remarks, "something sacred." From the opening shot—the slow birth of a breaking dawn—the images breathe a trancelike serenity, and the sight of kids getting bathed in the open air feels as steeped in meaning as a baptism. If you can handle the idea of a visit to MOMA becoming a spiritual retreat—the film screens there from September 24-29—your stamina will be rewarded.

—Anthony Lane

THE THEATRE OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ALIENS WITH EXTRAORDINARY SKILLS

Women's Project presents Saviana Stanescu's dark comedy, about a Moldavian clown trying to obtain a U.S. work visa. Tea Alagic directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 30. (424 W. 55th St. 212-239-6200.)

ALL MY SONS

John Lithgow, Dianne Wiest, Patrick Wilson, and Katie Holmes star in Arthur Miller's play from 1947, about a businessman's shady dealings during the Second World War. Simon McBurney directs. In previews. (Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

CLOSE TIES

Ensemble Studio Theatre presents a drama by Elizabeth Diggs, about a family dealing with the failing health of its matriarch. Pamela Berlin directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 25. (549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

EQUUS

Daniel Radcliffe, Richard Griffiths, and Kate Mulgrew star in Peter Shaffer's 1974 drama, about a disturbed teen-ager and his psychiatrist. Thea Sharrock directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 25. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

FAULT LINES

Naked Angels presents a new play by Stephen Belber, a dark comedy about two friends on a boys' night out. Noah Emmerich and Josh Lucas star; David Schwimmer directs. In previews. Opens Sept. 30. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 212-239-6200.)

FIFTY WORDS

Michael Weller wrote this play, starring Elizabeth Marvel and Norbert Leo Butz, about a crazy night in the life of a young Brooklyn family. Austin Pendleton directs the MCC Theatre production. In previews. Opens Sept. 28. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

IN CONFLICT

Douglas C. Wager adapted Yvonne Latty's book, a compendium of the views of a cross-section of Iraq-war veterans. Opens Sept. 24. (Culture Project, 27 Barrow St. 212-352-3101.)

KINDNESS

Playwrights Horizons presents the premiere of a new play by Adam Rapp, who also directs, about a Midwestern woman who takes her teen-age son to Manhattan to escape her life in Illinois. Annette O'Toole stars. Previews begin Sept. 25. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Frank Langella stars in Robert Bolt's 1961 account of Sir Thomas More, who voiced his objections to King Henry VIII when he left the Catholic Church. Doug Hughes directs the Roundabout Theatre Company production. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

THE SEAGULL

Kristin Scott Thomas, Peter Sarsgaard, Mackenzie Crook (from the British version of "The Office"), and Zoe Kazan star in Chekhov's play, in a translation by Christopher Hampton. Ian Rickson directs the Royal Court Theatre production. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

13

Jason Robert Brown ("Parade") wrote the music and lyrics and Dan Elish and Robert Horn wrote the book for this musical, about a New York City teen-ager who is forced to move to Indiana with his newly divorced mother. Jeremy Sams directs. In previews. (Bernard B. Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

Nick Whitby wrote this play, based on the film of the same name, a black comedy set in Warsaw in 1939, about a theatre troupe that becomes involved in spy games during the war. Casey Nicholaw directs. The Manhattan Theatre Club production stars David Rasche, Peter Maloney, and Jan Maxwell. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

WIG OUT!

Erik King stars in Tarell Alvin McCraney's new play, in which two drag-queen houses duke it out. In previews. Opens Sept. 30. (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

NOW PLAYING

ANGER/NATION

The Kitchen premieres a new play by Radio-hole, about the nineteenth-century temperance advocate Carry A. Nation. (512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Sept. 27.)

CELEBRITY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Everyone has a story to tell—even Kenny Loggins. In this inspired series, a rotating cast performs excerpts from celebrity memoirs: the more inane, the better. At a recent show, Claudia Shear channelled Ivana Trump (author of "For Love Alone"), Eugene Pack read from Neil Sedaka's "Laughter in the Rain," and the irresistible trio of Cheyenne Jackson, Kristen Johnston, and Rachel Dratch offered varying accounts of the same events as chronicled by Burt Reynolds ("My Life"), Loni Anderson ("My Life in High Heels"), and—this is real—Burt Reynolds's personal assistant ("Burt and Me"). The books translate so effortlessly into camp that it's hard to believe they were published in earnest. But, for each, the comic payoff is worth the price of the advance. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 212-868-4444.)

THE GLASS CAPE

The Mint presents the U.S. premiere of J. B. Priestley's drama, about a family whose youngest son brings his Native American wife and her siblings home for a visit. Lou Jacob directs. (311 W. 43rd St. 212-315-0231.)

JOHNNY ON A SPOT

The Peccadillo Theatre, under the direction of Dan Wackerman, is known for burnishing forgotten gems. "Johnny on a Spot" would seem to be well within their area of expertise, but in this case, the production never really comes off. In spite of a brilliant comic turn by Margery Beddow, as a Southern cathouse madam, this revival of Charles MacArthur's 1942 political farce is shrill and too tightly wound. The play follows a Southern governor's well-oiled run for Senate, a campaign that continues merrily on long after the illustrious governor drops dead. He gets elected anyway, despite his lack of a pulse. Viewers of the recent Republican convention may experience a jolt of déjà vu. (423 W. 46th St. 212-352-3101.)

THE MARVELOUS WONDERETTES

Roger Bean's girl-group jukebox musical, created for the Milwaukee Rep, is an unrepentantly corny sashay through a fifties and sixties hit parade. With their pastel crinolines and matching hairdos, the four harmonizing Wonderettes fit together like a packet of crayons: sassy Betty Jean, preening Cindy Lou, ditzzy Suzy, bashful Missy. The prospect of an all-female musical, especially one with crackling performers like these, is rare enough that it's disappointing to see Bean's flimsy book and chirpy direction rub all the provocative edges off songs like "Teacher's Pet"—and deny the characters any transformation between 1958 and 1968. (All that these women get out of the sixties is a pair of go-go boots.) Still, for those who are happy to glide along on the candy-coated nostalgia that Bean delivers with such naïve boosterism, watching these likable gals sing "Lollipop" packs quite a sugar high. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200.)

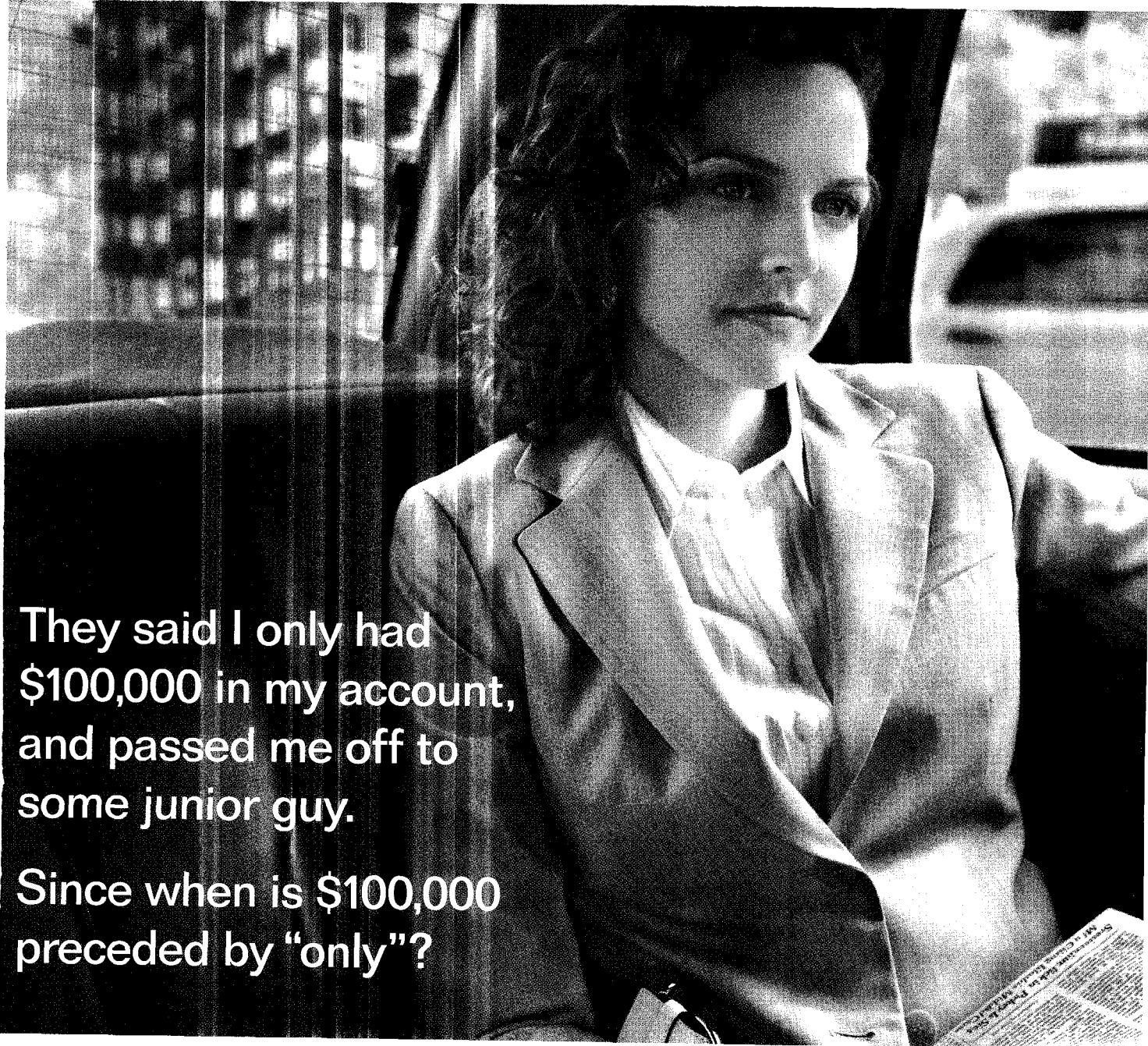
NEW YORK CLOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL

The third annual festival includes workshops, lectures, cabaret performances, and pie fights, featuring buffoons from around the world. (Brick Theatre, 575 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 28.)

SOUTHERN PROMISES

The twenty-eight-year-old black playwright Thomas Bradshaw's new play is divided into twenty-two short scenes, about Benjamin (Erwin E. A. Thomas), a slave who lives on a Southern plantation with his wife, Charlotte (Sadrina Johnson). There, they service—in more ways than one, but never together—the mistress of the house, Elizabeth (Lia

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Aprile), and, eventually, her brother-in-law, David (Jeff Biehl), who takes over as master of the estate once his brother, Isaiah (Peter McCabe), dies. Isaiah's dying wish was that his slaves be set free, but David and Elizabeth refuse to fulfill it. Unfortunately, the director, Jose Zayas, messes up this absurdist work by trying to shoehorn it into a realistic mode. The play should move quickly, barely giving us time to absorb one aspect of its comedic horror before we're called upon to watch another. Instead, the action drags as Zayas gives the actors unnecessary subtext. (Reviewed in our issue of 9/29/08.) (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through Sept. 27.)

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Jill Santoriello wrote the book, music, and lyrics for this musical adaptation of the Dickens novel. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE TEMPEST

Mandy Patinkin stars in the Shakespeare comedy at Classic Stage Company. Brian Kulick directs. (Reviewed in this issue.) (136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

lievably; Tierney talks movingly about loss; one character meets a wrenchingly tragic end. The dark twist in the final act is both the play's most interesting idea and its least convincing one—an unearned, infuriating gimmick. (416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

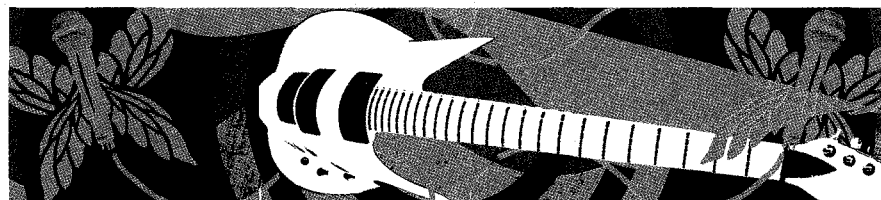
WHAT'S THAT SMELL:

THE MUSIC OF JACOB STERLING

The world premiere of a comedy written and performed by David Pittu ("Is He Dead?"), a satire about a musical-theatre composer, with music by Randy Redd. (Atlantic Stage 2, at 330 W. 16th St. 212-279-4200.)

Also Playing

ABSINTHE: Spiegel Tent, South Street Seaport, Pier 17. 212-279-4200. **AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Sept. 28. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AYE-NUE ♀:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **ENTER LAUGHING:** St. Peter's The-



POP NOTES THAT SEVENTIES SOUND

Last month, Jackson Browne sued the Republican Party over the use of his hit "Running on Empty" in a campaign commercial. Pundits joked that Browne was a has-been, but here he is with "Time the Conqueror" (Inside), his first album in six years. Both the title song and "Off of Wonderland" find him reminiscing about his own past; "The Arms of Night" ponders without being ponderous; and "Where Were You" is a sharp Katrina lament. Other songs are more bromidic, displaying the earnestness that has sometimes made Browne the target of derision—most recently on Randy Newman's new album "Harps and Angels," where Newman imagines Browne as a kind of Secretary of Humanity. And while a title like "Live Nude Girls" may promise raciness, the song itself is a typical Browne ballad: thoughtful, lyrical, appealingly sung. The most surprising thing about the album is its cover photo, a portrait of the artist as a graybeard.

After Freddie Mercury died, in 1991, the fate of Queen seemed clear: the guitarist Brian May and the drummer Roger Taylor would hang it up, unable to continue without their idiosyncratic, flamboyant front man. But May and Taylor were more resourceful: they simply acquired a less idiosyncratic, less flamboyant front man—the veteran belter Paul Rodgers—and soldiered on, playing old Queen favorites in a new, senseless context. Now the band

has released "The Cosmos Rocks" (EMI), a studio album that's everything that Freddie Mercury fans could have hoped for: a minor travesty. Questions of good and bad are irrelevant—this is Queen, remember. Still, nearly every song is laughably generic, as May piles on guitar effects and Rodgers alternates between fist-pumping rockers and power ballads. If there's a theme, it probably has to do with our place in the universe, as the title suggests. But May, who recently returned to school to complete his Ph.D. thesis ("A Survey of Radial Velocities in the Zodiacal Dust Cloud"), should rediscover life on earth instead.

Since Todd Rundgren's early-seventies heyday, he has pursued at least three creative paths that often seem at cross-purposes: power-pop perfectionist, prog-rock adventurer, and spiritual seeker. "Arena" (Hi Fi), his twenty-second solo album, finds him in the first of these camps; the album marks a return to the big chords and choruses of late-seventies arena rock. The songs have simple titles ("Mad," "Gun," "Panic"), and the music matches. "Strike" is an eerie imitation of AC/DC; "Courage" has a broad, multi-tracked sweep. Throughout "Arena," Rundgren's melodic and vocal skill is intact, and his self-indulgence is mostly in check.

—Ben Greenman

THREE CHANGES

Nicky Silver's new play, in premiere at Playwrights Horizons, centers on a Manhattan couple, Nate (Dylan McDermott) and Laurel (Maura Tierney), whose lives are disrupted when Nate's long-lost brother, Hal (Scott Cohen), an erstwhile TV producer, shows up, needing a place to stay. Much of the writing hews closely to stereotype—Nate works in finance and has a young mistress, Laurel is kindhearted, Hal is creative, bisexual, and up to no good—and most of the performances are so stiff or so grating that the play almost seems to be striving for detached artificiality. Except that it isn't: Cohen inhabits Hal comfortably and be-

atre, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 212-935-5820. **FELA!** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **LADY:** Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. **THE QUARREL:** DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. Through Sept. 28. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **[TITLE OF SHOW]:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BLENDER THEATRE AT GRAMERCY

127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—The Jam was an incendiary trio of British punks who matched the taut songwriting and mod sharpness of classic bands like The Who and the Small Faces with the energy and insouciant venom of the Sex Pistols. The band acrimoniously imploded in 1982, and the lead singer and guitarist, Paul Weller, moved on to form the Style Council (he now has a successful solo career). Time wasn't as kind to the Jam's rhythm section, the drummer Rick Buckler and the bassist Bruce Foxton. After several years in the ranks of the Irish punk band Stiff Little Fingers, Foxton reunited with Buckler (who had quit the music business in order to spend time antiquing) and formed *From the Jam* (here Sept. 26), which is little more than a tribute band to their former trio. The vocalist Russell Hastings and multi-instrumentalist David Moore help make up for Weller's absence.

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA

17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Sept. 27: A night of top-shelf folk with Dar Williams and Shawn Mullins.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM

431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Sept. 24: Loudon Wainwright III. On his new record, "Recovery," Wainwright teams up with producer Joe Henry, with whom he collaborated on last year's album "Strange WeirDOS," essentially the soundtrack album for the film "Knocked Up." The new release revisits and reworks some vintage material, stretching back to 1973, and it'll be at the heart of this show. There's at least one wonderfully clever turn of phrase in each of Wainwright's songs, one that manages to cross the line from glibly funny to genuinely affecting, and his voice is as rangy and flexible as ever.

JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH

55 Washington Sq. S. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 25-26: Steve Earle, the Michael Moore of alternative country, wraps up his summer tour of North America. He'll be joined by his wife, the country singer Allison Moorer, and he'll be performing songs from his latest album, "Washington Square Serenade." It's an acclaimed song cycle about his love of New York City, his home for the past three years.

LIVING ROOM

154 Ludlow St. (212-533-7235)—Sept. 26: Life in a Blender is a long-running Brooklyn institution specializing in quirkily heartfelt pop that is both surreal and thought-provoking. Lately, the lead singer Don Rauf's endearingly absurd musings come augmented with lush arrangements. Though rife with oddness, the band's work hides moments of poignancy and introspection amidst the laughs. Its album "The Heart Is a Small Balloon" came out early last year. With *Old School Freight Train*, a collection of young musicians from Charlottesville, Virginia, that's caught the attention of the mandolin virtuoso and "new-grass" founder David Grisman; they've backed him on recent tours. Also on the bill is the eclectic Brooklyn-based outfit Piñatland, which has an oompah flavor and an obsession with overlooked, often bizarre corners of American history.

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN

Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (212-307-7171)—Sept. 24: Arguably the least likely band to become alternative-rock icons, Weezer arrived in 1994 with a self-titled major-label album of hook-laden pop and immediately endeared themselves to a young audience tired of po-faced grunge. Five albums later, Weezer has scaled hills of acclaim and fallen into valleys of obscurity. Still, they have a vehemently faithful following who have eagerly snapped up their latest color-coded eponymous album (a.k.a. "the red album"). With the skittish sounds of Tokyo Police Club, a popular indie-rock group from Ontario.

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE

2 W. 64th St. (212-277-7179)—Sept. 26-27: The great Southern-fried band **Little Feat** lost its driving force when its front man, Lowell George, died, in 1979, but it hasn't stopped cruising along. It keeps up a steady touring schedule and it is revered by music-business insiders. Perhaps a bit too much so, at least to judge from its latest album, "Join the Band." It features new versions of old favorites, with star turns by Jimmy Buffett, Dave Matthews, Emmylou Harris, Chris Robinson, Bob Seger, Vince Gill, Béla Fleck, Brooks and Dunn, and many others. The new versions are far too respectful of the originals, and the effort largely falls flat.

RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL

Sixth Ave. at 50th St. (212-247-4777)—Sept. 25: The veteran country singer and current biodiesel advocate **Willie Nelson**.

S.O.B.'S

204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—Sept. 30: **Raphael Saadiq** first hit it big twenty years ago with the new-jack swing of *Toni! Toni! Toné!* before going on to a successful producing and solo career. He's a smooth performer who is well versed in the history of soul music. His new album, "The Way I See It," has echoes of the Temptations, Booker T, and Bill Withers, but it is completely its own thing—so retro it's avant.

SPIEGELTENT

Pier 17, South Street Seaport (212-279-4200)—Sept. 30: The **Bird and the Bee** are Inara George, a singer (and the daughter of the late Little Feat leader, Lowell George), and Greg Kurstin, a producer and keyboardist who has worked with the likes of the Flaming Lips and Beck. The pair come from Los Angeles, where they've been perfecting a smooth pop sound that's indebted to vintage bossa nova, sixties girl groups, and contemporary hip-hop.

TERMINAL 5

610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Sept. 25-26: In the mid-eighties, Arizona's **Meat Puppets**, led by the brothers Curt and Kris Kirkwood, spliced blues, country, and psychedelia elements into its frantically punk guitar fray and reigned over a bizarre middle ground between the Grateful Dead and Black Flag. With the backing of Kurt Cobain, they had a touch of mainstream success, but Kris's drug addiction brought an end to that. The band soldiered on without him for a couple of albums before he cleaned up his act and rejoined the group, last year. Along for the ride are the noisy and influential indie favorites **Built to Spill** and **Dinosaur Jr.**

WEBSTER HALL

125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Sept. 24: **Calexico** is a captivating musical collective from Tucson that makes haunting, cinematic music steeped in the mythology of the Southwest. Simultaneously traditional and experimental, Calexico pushes the envelope of so-called post-rock, incorporating the folksy accessibility of country music. Its new album is "Carried to Dust." Sept. 26-27: The young men in the hard-driving Nashville band **Old Crow Medicine Show** deliver old-time country music as it's seldom before been heard. Their heartbreaking, plunky ballads and unfastened fiddle tunes are charged with the youthful vigor of punk rock. Their latest album, "Tennessee Pusher," was produced by Don Was and includes a cautionary tale of the dangers of contemporary drug use, the song "Methamphetamine."

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Sept. 26: The electric guitarist **Prasanna** plays both classic music from the southern part of his native India and classic rock from the U.S. Half of this program will be devoted to the former and half to "Electric Ganesha Land," his 2006 tribute album to Jimi Hendrix. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St.) Sept. 27: The Greek singer **Savina Yannatou**. (Symphony Space.) Sept. 28: The vocalist **Mor Karbasi**, a descendant of Moroccan and Persian Jews, performs songs from or inspired by the Jewish culture of fifteenth-century Spain. This afternoon show is her New York City debut. (Spiegel Tent, Pier 17, South Street Seaport. For more information about all shows, call 212-545-7536.)



"Jenya in My Hotel Room, Ukraine, 2005," by Michal Chelbin, at Meislin.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Sept. 23-Oct. 11: The vocalist **KT Sullivan** targets the enduring work of Jerome Kern.

BIRDLAND

315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Sept. 23-27: The Broadway diva **Betty Buckley** makes canny use of an uncommonly expansive repertoire, and she has a telepathic relationship with a great pianist, **Kenny Werner**.

BLUE NOTE

131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Sept. 23-24: The **Francisco Mela** quintet. The drummer Mela is joined by two strong front-line players: the pianist **Jason Moran** and the guitarist **Peter Bernstein**. Sept. 25-28: Celebrating a long-lasting musical partnership (as well as fifty years of marriage), the singer **Cleo Laine** and the saxophonist **John Dankworth** like their jazz buffed to an elegant sheen.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA

Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—The Diet Coke Women in Jazz Festival continues this month, with **Nnenna Freelon**, in a salute to Billie Holiday (Sept. 24-28), the vocalist **Gretchen Parlato** (Sept. 29), and the soprano saxophonist **Jane Ira Bloom** (Sept. 30).

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY

540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Sept. 23-Oct. 4: The pride of Long Island, **Nikki Blonsky**. Continuing her adventures in pluck, the nineteen-year-old, who became a star thanks to her role in the recent movie version of "Hairspray," storms the cabaret circuit.

FESTIVAL OF NEW TRUMPET MUSIC

The gathering closes with a highlight, as a host of first-class trumpeters and supporting musicians gather at the **Jazz Standard** for a tribute to the late, lamented **Woody Shaw**, a genius of post-bop trumpet. The drummer **Victor Lewis**, a longtime

Shaw collaborator, coordinated the effort. The soloists include **Ingrid Jensen** and **Tim Hagans** (Sept. 25), **Brian Lynch**, **Paolo Fresu**, and **Terrell Stafford** (Sept. 26), **Nick Roseboro** and **Sean Jones** (Sept. 27), and **Dave Douglas**, **Randy Brecker**, and **Josh Evans** (Sept. 28). (For more information, visit www.fontmusic.org.)

IRIDIUM

1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Sept. 25-28: The guitarist **Stanley Jordan** and his trio. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul**.

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER

Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—Sept. 26-27: The guitarist **Lionel Loueke** and the bassist **Richard Bona** share both African roots (Loueke is from Benin, Bona is from Cameroon) and virtuosic control of their instruments.

JAZZ STANDARD

116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Sept. 24: **Daniilo Pérez's** current string-laden release, "Across the Crystal Sea," is too slick for its own good. The pianist is capable of sharper improvising than is found on the album, and his playing is better served in a small group. His trio here utilizes the bassist **Ben Street** and the drummer **Adam Cruz**. Sept. 25-28: A tribute to **Woody Shaw** (see the Festival of New Trumpet Music). Sept. 30: The saxophonist **Donny McCaslin**, a mainstay of **Dave Douglas's** quintet, takes the stage with a demanding bass-and-drums backing. It's a sparse setting that produced rewarding results on his new album, "Recommended Tools."

VILLAGE VANGUARD

178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Sept. 23-28: The **Bad Plus**—the pianist **Ethan Iverson**, the bassist **Reid Anderson**, and the drummer **David King**—haven't turned out to be the future of jazz. But the three still have plenty of tricks up their sleeves, and their canny originals are of more enduring interest than the rock adaptations that gained them fame. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—“Giorgio Morandi, 1890-1964.” Through Dec. 14. ♦ “Landscapes Clear and Radiant: The Art of Wang Hui (1632-1717).” Through Jan. 4. ♦ “Royal Porcelain from the Twink Collection: 1800-1850.” Through April 19. ♦ “Jeff Koons on the Roof.” Through Oct. 26. ♦ “Rhythms of Modern Life: British Prints 1914-1939.” Through Dec. 7. ♦ “New York, N. Why?: Photographs by Rudy Burckhardt, 1937-1940.” Through Jan. 4. ♦ “The Essential Art of African Textiles: Design Without End.” Opens Sept. 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—“Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night.” Through Jan. 5. ♦ “Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling.” Through Oct. 20. ♦ “Projects 88: Lucy McKenzie.” Through Dec. 1. ♦ “Kirchner and the Berlin Street.” Through Nov. 10. ♦ “New Photography 2008: Josephine Meckseper and Mikhael Subotzky.” Through Jan. 5. ♦ “Looking at Music.” Through Jan. 5. ♦ “Here Is Every: Four Decades of Contemporary Art.” Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—“Catherine Opie: American Photographer.” Opens Sept. 26. ♦ “Louise Bourgeois.” Through Sept. 28. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART

Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—“Progress.” Through Nov. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—“Jesper Just: Romantic Delusions.” Through Jan. 4. ♦ “21: Selections of Contemporary Art from the Brooklyn Museum.” Ongoing. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—“The Horse.” Through Jan. 4. ♦ “Lizards and Snakes: Alive!” Through Jan. 5. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

BRONX MUSEUM OF THE ARTS

1040 Grand Concourse (718-681-6000)—“Street Art, Street Life: From the 1950s to Now.” Through Jan. 25. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM

Fifth Ave., at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—“The Dead Sea Scrolls: Mysteries of the Ancient World.” Through Jan. 4. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—“Drawing Babar: Early Drafts and Watercolors.” Through Jan. 4. ♦ “Liszt in Paris: Enduring Encounters.” Through Nov. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

SCULPTURECENTER

44-19 Purves St., Long Island City (718-361-1750)—“Martin Boyce and Ugo Rondinone: We Burn, We Shiver.” Through Nov. 30. ♦ “Degrees of Remove: Landscape and Affect.” Through Nov. 30. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

MINOR WHITE

The legendary White (1908-76) might be a little too earnest and old-school for today's audience, but this

overstuffed survey makes a strong case for his continued importance. Although he produced a wide range of images—notably the urban views, California landscapes, and male nudes included here—White is best known for his abstractions of the natural world. Studies of frost, rocks, and sand have a vaguely spiritual dimension that suggests an intense communion with the elements. Works by sixteen photographers influenced by White (Paul Caponigro, Kenneth Josephson, and John Goodman among them) point to the vitality of this vision without quite matching it. Through Oct. 18. (Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Short List

FISCHLI & WEISS: Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through Oct. 18. **MARY HEILMANN:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Oct. 25. **JOSEF KOUDEKA / JUDITH JOY ROSS:** Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Oct. 11. **JANET MALCOLM:** Bookstein, 37 W. 57th St. 212-750-0949. Through Oct. 11. **GIUSEPPE PENONE:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Oct. 11.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ROBERT BORDO

The title of Bordo's show, “It's Always Raining,” suits the tone of his paintings. The palette is muted; raindrops are represented in a range of inventive methods. Sometimes they're multicolored, made by broken strokes reminiscent of the Impressionists or the Fauves. Elsewhere they're laid on with a wide, flat brush. But while the imagery leans toward describing a place, it never arrives there. The gauzy veils of precipitation are suspended like curtains in front of a stage, refusing to open onto the proscenium-like space of conventional landscapes. Through Oct. 11. (Alexander and Bonin, 132 Tenth Ave., at 18th St. 212-367-7474.)

NATHAN CARTER

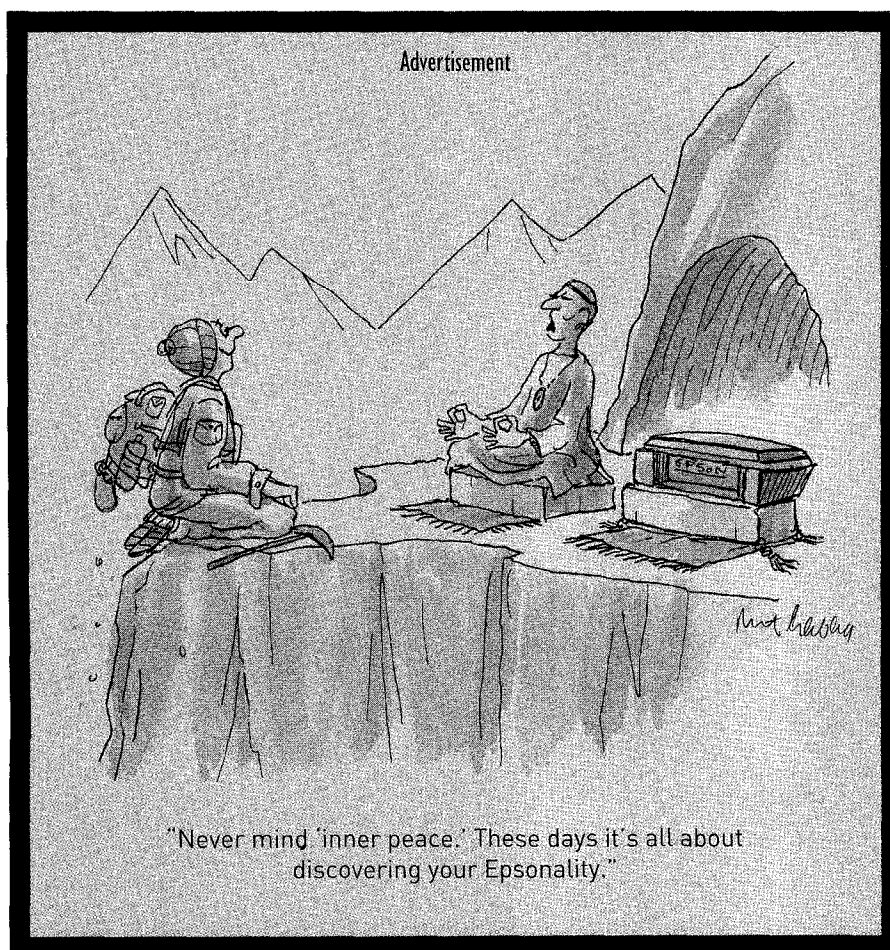
Carter is enamored of communication networks: the show's title is “Radio Transmissions Contraptions.” For his fourth solo show at the gallery, he collaborated with a glass-and-ceramic studio in Mexico, turning out sturdy objects reminiscent of Picasso's Surrealism-tinged sculptures, Calder's “stabiles,” and the flat, bright palette of Matisse. It's a clever move, reviving early-modernist abstract motifs and using them as antennas, semaphores, and, as the title of one work suggests, “reflector plumage with all mod cons,” but the results appear somewhat disjointed. Through Oct. 4. (Kaplan, 525 W. 21st St. 212-645-7335.)

KEVIN COOLEY

Cooley shows six large color photographs and three videos of what appear to be alarming atmospheric phenomena. The nighttime California landscape glows in the distance as if the sun were stuck just above the horizon; the Wyoming wilderness shoots a thin, brilliant stream of light high into the midnight-blue sky. The explanations for these events—long exposures, forest fires, flares—don't make the pictures any less arresting or mysterious. But none are as much fun as the video of meteor-like flares suddenly zooming across a snow-covered forest at night and disappearing into the pines while unseen wolves howl. Through Oct. 11. (Audiello, 526 W. 26th St. 212-675-9082.)

JUDY GLANTZMAN

Like Renaissance notebooks in which paper-conserving artists used every inch of a page, Glantzman's paintings are crammed with renderings of hands and heads attached to embryonic bodies. (The pinkish surfaces also recall the underpaintings of frescoes.) A mural includes cast-resin heads and hands, which pop out from the wall like gargoyles. A gallery statement describes the works in the show—swirling compositions mimicking scenes of the Last Judgment and descents into Purgatory—as “interior self-portraits.” Perhaps Glantzman has been brushing up on Freud's psychoanalytic study of Leonardo da Vinci. Through Oct. 11. (Cuningham, 541 W. 25th St. 212-242-2772.)



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MARTHA ROSLER

Rosler's new photomontages are as irately political as ever, while straining toward the gravitas of history painting (look for echoes of Jacques-Louis David's "Oath of the Horatii" in the twelve-foot-wide banner "Prospect for Today"). She also introduces some bells and whistles: a twenty-five-cent turnstile admits visitors to the gallery (proceeds benefit anti-war charities); a giant prosthetic leg kicks in time to a tinny recording of "God Bless America." The most powerful part of the show may be its lowest-fi, as Rosler makes public her scrapbooks crammed with clippings about Guantánamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, political protests, and what happens to families when soldiers come home. Through Oct. 11. (Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 536 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400.)

JOEL STERNFELD

The subject of Sternfeld's biggest and most beautiful photographs in years is a tract of largely uncultivated and unremarkable land along the Connecticut River in western Massachusetts. Seen over the course of four seasons, the region's meadows, woodlands, flooded fields, and dirt roads are far from picturesque, but in these huge color prints (each more than seven feet wide) their humbleness translates as quiet, hard-scrabble grandeur. If there's an eco-conscious agenda here, it's secondary to Sternfeld's rapt attention to the changing quality of light on the land as it turns from barren to luxuriant and back. Through Oct. 4. (Luhning Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100.)

TAM VAN TRAN

Pieces from two already familiar series line the gallery walls: large squares of paper painted with acrylic, chlorophyll, and spirulina in dripping patterns and cut canvases sculpted into undulating, reptilian armatures, with the aid of thousands of glinting staples. The artist moves forward with a group of tabletop ceramic sculptures that suggest ghost ships festooned with candles, curlicues of decay, and hints of faces (one is titled "The Saul Steinberg Revue"). Tran's sci-fi-meets-Wifredo-Lam-meets-couture aesthetic is still intriguing, if slow to evolve. Through Oct. 4. (Cohan and Leslie, 138 Tenth Ave., at 19th St. 212-206-8710.)

MASAO YAMAMOTO

In a departure from the collagelike installations of small, unframed photographs that characterized his previous shows, Yamamoto exhibits a number of comparatively large framed pictures alongside one of those eccentric groupings. The decision to focus attention on individual images raises a question that the constellations tended to obscure: Yamamoto makes lovely, lighter-than-air photographs, but how many can stand on their own? Nearly all of them, it turns out, including images of two delicate waterfalls, a mesmerizing eagle, a breaking wave that morphs into a cloud, and a tossed ball suspended like a dark sun above a small, waiting hand. Through Oct. 18. (Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610.)

Short List

DOUG AITKEN: 303 Gallery, 547 W. 21st St. and 525 W. 22nd St. 212-255-1121. Through Nov. 1. **LOUISE BOURGEOIS:** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Nov. 1. **MICHAEL CHELBIN:** Meislin, 526 W. 26th St. 212-627-2552. Through Oct. 18. **JERONIMO ELESPE:** Connelly, 625 W. 27th St. 212-337-9563. Through Oct. 11. **MATTHEW DAY JACKSON:** Blum, 526 W. 29th St. 212-244-6055. Through Nov. 8; Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Oct. 18. **MICHAEL KREBER:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through Oct. 30. **MARIO MERZ:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-9300. Through Dec. 30. **VIK MUNIZ:** Sikkema Jenkins, 530 W. 22nd St. 212-929-2340. Through Oct. 11. **ALIX PEARLSTEIN:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through Oct. 18. **TONY SMITH:** Marks, 525 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through Oct. 25. **SUE WILLIAMS:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Oct. 25.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN**RASHAWN GRIFFIN**

Formally rich and defiantly nostalgic, Griffin's solo debut constructs the mindscape of someone who

reads in a treehouse, idolizes his grandmother, and goes clubbing and wakes up down by the railroad tracks. Or, at least, someone who likes to imagine someone like that. Patchwork fabric assemblages evoke abstract painting, minimalist sculpture, and handicraft; grotty-pastoral installations of dried weeds are propped in corners; dainty colored-pencil drawings hang on the walls, as does a series of canvases collaged with pages from Ursula K. Le Guin's classic fantasy novel "A Wizard of Earthsea," in which a romantic manchild saves the world. Through Oct. 5. (Smith-Stewart, 53 Stanton St. 212-477-2821.)



The New York Clown Theatre Festival, at the Brick Theatre, in Williamsburg.

RAHA RAISSNIA

The ghosts of Moholy-Nagy, the Russian Constructivists, and Stan Brakhage haunt Raissnia's second solo show at the gallery. An installation using manipulated found film strips and reworked slides is projected onto a wall, and accompanied by a minimalist soundtrack (by Charles Curtis). Architecturally abstract paintings are less interesting than the multimedia piece, though they take the same raid-the-vaults approach to art history, harking back to early Abstract Expressionism, when palettes pared down to stark black-and-white were the rage. Through Oct. 19. (Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774.)

Short List

MEDARDO ROSSO: Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through Nov. 1. **RIRKRIT TIRAVANJIA:** The Drawing Center, 35 Wooster St. 212-219-2166. Through Nov. 6. **ROGER WHITE:** Uffner, 47 Orchard St. 212-274-0064. Through Nov. 2. **"USEFUL GESTURES / USELESS GESTURES":** Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Oct. 19.

DANCE**BALLET NY**

Judith Fugate and Medhi Bahiri's chamber ballet company celebrates ten years, at the Joyce. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 23-24 at 7:30, Sept. 25-26 at 8, Sept. 27 at 2 and 8, and Sept. 28 at 2 and 7:30.)

"FALL FOR DANCE"

Highlights from the final days include the Suzanne Farrell Ballet, exhuming the rare Balanchine piece "Pithoprakta," the volcanic Fang-Yi Sheu, the San Francisco Ballet, and the up-and-coming Kate Weare Company. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Sept. 23-27 at 8.)

TERE O'CONNOR DANCE

O'Connor's "Rammed Earth" gets a welcome reprise in a new space. Though the title refers to a building

technique involving shifting layers, and the dance itself requires viewers to move around and shift perspective, the most intriguing shifts in the work are tonal. Created in collaboration with a cast of unfailingly interesting dancers (Heather Olson, Matthew Rogers, Hilary Clark, and Christopher Williams), the piece continually veers from dry experiment into droll satire and back, blurring the distinction between the two. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200. Sept. 24-28 at 7 and 9.)

JANE COMFORT AND COMPANY

In "An American Rendition," dancers perform the story of an American citizen who falls victim to ex-

traordinary rendition and torture by his own government, which is juxtaposed, by the sound of changing channels, with reality-TV shows. The comparison brings out the absurdity of Big Brother bureaucracy, the cruelty and humiliation of the television contests, and the fine line between the two. Farcical, sombre, and violent, the piece manages to reach some strange, disturbing places. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Sept. 24 and Sept. 26 at 8, Sept. 25 at 7:30, Sept. 27 at 2 and 8, and Sept. 28 at 2.)

IVANA MÜLLER

Presented by the French Institute Alliance Française as part of its "Crossing the Line" festival, "While We Were Holding It Together" is a performance piece by the Croatian-born performance artist/choreographer/theatre director Ivana Müller. As the five performers hold enigmatic all-purpose poses, Müller suggests multiple story lines and levels of interpretation, in what amounts to a magnificent exercise for the imagination. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Sept. 24-26 at 8.)

"RAPTURE"

The choreographer Noémie Lafrance—who in past years presented works in the abandoned McCarren Park Pool and on the steps of the New York City Building Clock Tower—has set her newest work, "Rapture," along the sinuous surfaces of Bard College's sumptuous Fisher Center (designed by Frank Gehry). The dancers, suspended in the air by a rigging system, walk, leap, tumble, and glide, performing mysterious rituals, in a conversation between human locomotion and ingenuity, physical courage, and sheer sweep. (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. Sept. 25-28 at 7. Through Oct. 5.)

CHRISTIAN RIZZO

The French choreographer, installation artist, and fashion designer makes his New York debut, while at the same time inaugurating a new venue, the Center for Performance Research, co-founded by John Jasperse and Jonah Bokaer. The offerings, which are free, take full advantage of the space.

In one small studio, two dresses are blown by fifteen fans; in the larger space, the Taiwanese performer I-Fang Lin does a cryptic solo about expatriate experience; and the film "Fantômes et Vanités No. 4" gets projected in an office. (361 Manhattan Ave., Brooklyn. 212-355-6100. Sept. 25-27 at 7:30.)

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY

"A Quarreling Pair" takes Jane Bowles's four-page puppet play, a cloistered study of two cohabiting sisters, and explodes it into a postmodern burlesque show. The tone and sensibility of the original survive in antique, silhouetted scenes and curious new songs. But these episodes are expanded into a Mexican drag act and surrounded by Jones's version of Bob Fosse: snazzy vaudeville numbers as metaphors for a cruel, depraved world. Executed with care, the result is one kind of curio transformed into another. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Sept. 30 at 7:30. Through Oct. 4.)

BALLETMET COLUMBUS

After a four-year absence, the Columbus-based ballet company presents a program of new works at the Joyce, all but two commissioned from young up-and-coming choreographers. The exceptions are an excerpt from David Nixon's full-length costume drama "Dracula" and "Play," an urbane, stripped-down piece by the Australian choreographer Stanton Welch, set to music by Moby. Of the novelties, perhaps the most intriguing is a bit of political punditry: a ballet inspired by Barack Obama's book "The Audacity of Hope," set to Mozart's "Requiem." (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Sept. 30 at 7:30. Through Oct. 5.)

WALLY CARDONA AND RAHEL VONMOOS

The Brooklyn-based choreographer and dancer Wally Cardona could be called a miniaturist of movement, such is the level of detail—physical, spatial, kinetic—he explores in his work. In "A Light Conversation," he joins the U.K.-based performer and choreographer Rahel Vonmoos in an intimate collaboration that explores a series of weighty human issues—love, friendship, uncertainty. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Sept. 30 at 8. Through Oct. 5.)

NEW YORK MUSICAL THEATRE FESTIVAL

In the festival's second week, Chicago Tap Theatre makes its New York debut with "The Hourglass and the Poisoned Pen," a comic book come to life. Bright and broad, it isn't going to convince many about tap's potential to convey complex narrative or depth of character, but it's novel and amusing. (For a full schedule, see www.nymf.org. Through Oct. 5.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

Ponchielli's "La Gioconda" is at once a farewell to Grand Opera and a preview of the verismo style of the composer's students (such as Mascagni). Margherita Wallmann's production is very, very old, but if "Gioconda" is well cast—and this revival features such singers as Deborah Voigt, Olga Borodina, Ewa Podles, and James Morris—the piece can be captivating. Christopher Wheeldon contributes delectable choreography to the "Dance of the Hours"; Daniele Callegari, in his house debut, conducts. (Sept. 24 and Sept. 27 at 8.) ♦ Karita Mattila's jaw-dropping performance in the title role of "Salome" in 2004 set New York on its ear, with her (very) brief nude scene adding to the excitement. Can she wow us again? Jürgen Flimm's production, at once worldly and mystical, returns as well, with Ildikó Komlósi, Kim Begley, Joseph Kaiser, and Juha Uusitalo completing the cast; Patrick Summers. (Sept. 26 and Sept. 30 at 8.) ♦ "Don Giovanni" got a definite lift at the house when Franco Zeffirelli's turgid traditional production was replaced with a clear and bracing modern effort from Marthe Keller. The magnetic Erwin Schrott—the current classical marketer's dream—takes the title role, heading an impressive cast that

also includes Krassimira Stoyanova, Susan Graham, Isabel Leonard, Matthew Polenzani, and Ildebrando D'Arcangelo; Louis Langrée, a brisk and efficient Mozartean, conducts. (Sept. 27 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

No American orchestra can claim such an honor roll of composer-conductors as the Philharmonic. Lorin Maazel and his orchestra make their first contribution to Carnegie Hall's Bernstein Festival by offering a concert that highlights all of them, from Bernstein (the Symphony No. 2, "The Age of Anxiety") and Boulez to Mahler (the Adagio from the Symphony No. 10) and Maazel himself. The soloists include the soprano Kiera Duffy, the pianist Joyce Yang, and the flutist Robert Langevin. (Sept. 25 at 7:30, Sept. 26 at 11 A.M., and Sept. 27 at 8.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY

Michael Tilson Thomas and his orchestra begin the Carnegie Hall season with music by Bernstein (a treasured mentor of Thomas's) before moving on to further adventures. Sept. 24 at 7: The soprano Dawn Upshaw, the baritone Thomas Hampson, and the cellist Yo-Yo Ma are out front in an all-Bernstein gala concert that features such gems as the Symphonic Dances from "West Side Story" and excerpts from "Songfest," "Mass," "On the Town," and "Trouble in Tahiti." ♦ Sept. 25 at 8: Ligeti's modern classic "Lontano" precedes Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos (with Katia and Marielle Labèque) and Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5. ♦ Sept. 26 at 8: In a surprisingly imposing finale, the contemporary British composer Oliver Knussen's Symphony No. 3 is followed by Beethoven's Ninth, with a lineup of vocalists that in-

cludes the soprano Erin Wall and the tenor Garrett Sorenson, assisted by the New York Choral Artists. (212-247-7800.)

PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA OF THE AMERICAS

Living up to her orchestra's title and mission, its founder, Alondra de la Parra, passes the baton to the young Canadian maestro Jean-Philippe Tremblay, who will lead its young musicians in performances of music from Argentina (Ginastera's "Variaciones Concertantes"), Brazil, Canada, and the U.S. (Richard Danielpour's "First Light"). (Museo del Barrio, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. 212-564-0508. Sept. 24 at 7.)

MUSIC AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM:

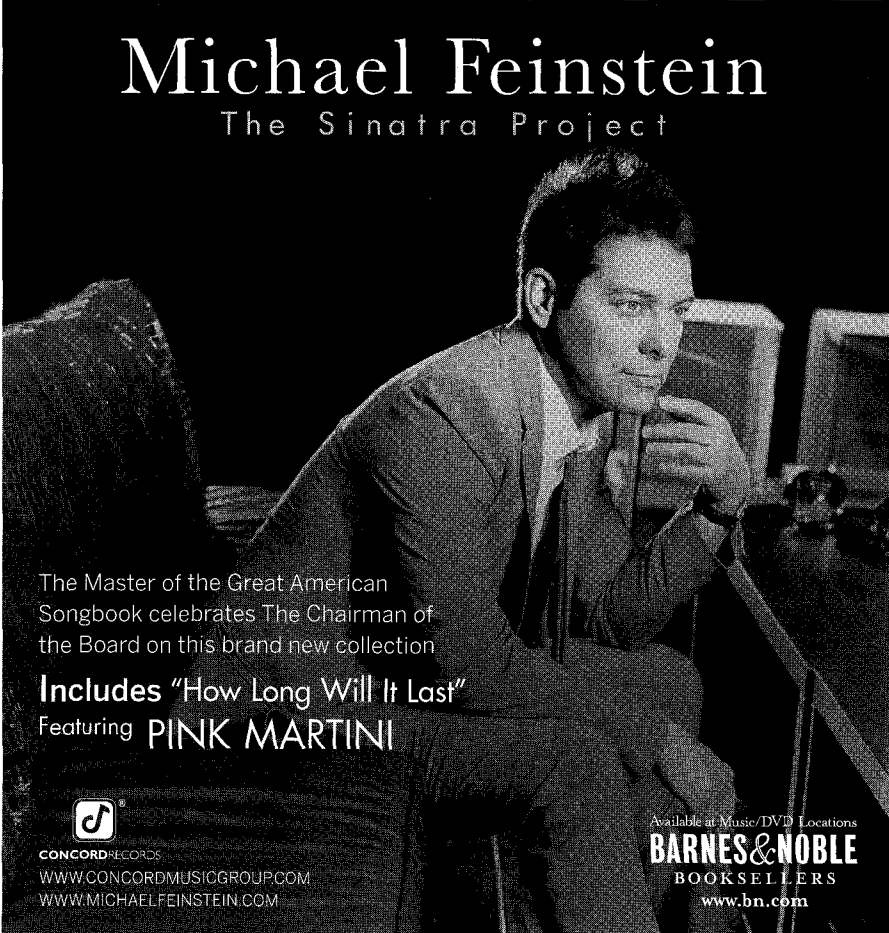
ORPHEUS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

The Museum's opening concert is both festive and bittersweet: in a tribute to Philippe de Monteblanco, the outgoing director of the Met, the conductorless chamber orchestra will perform Saint-Saëns's jolly "Carnival of the Animals," with the pianists Orion Weiss and Inon Barnatan as soloists and with de Monteblanco reading Ogden Nash's witty verses in his plummy, urbane baritone. Also on the program are two diverting symphonies, Mozart's No. 29 in A Major and Mendelssohn's String Symphony No. 10 in B Minor. (Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 212-570-3949. Sept. 26 at 8.)

RECITALS

BARGEMUSIC

The next offering in the barge's ambitious "Here and Now" series, concerts of contemporary American music, is a program in honor of the seventieth birthday of Charles Wuorinen, a composer whose music balances formidable structural complexity with a tightly coiled animal energy. The violinist Aaron Boyd, the pianist Steven Beck, and the percussionist Alex Lipowski are on hand to perform such works as "Jos-



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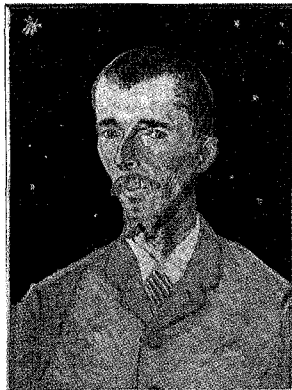
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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK THE NIGHT STUFF

Poignantly inferior paintings surprise in "Van Gogh and the Colors of the Night," an instructive little show in new, cozy galleries at MOMA. (Good luck squeezing in.) There are masterpieces, too—"The Starry Night," "The Night Café,"



"Gauguin's Chair," and the indelibly weird "The Potato Eaters"—as well as wonderful drawings (none better, in all of art, than "Café Terrace at Night"). But at issue is the distraught ambition of a late-blooming, fragile man, seen in efforts to express the character of the world at sundown and after dark. Early tonal platitudes give way to forced imitations of Millet and other misfires. ("The Stevedores in Arles" anticipates nothing so much as strip-mall paintings on velvet.) Van Gogh did the improbable, winning by trying too hard—banging into limits that disintegrated, as profound inventions of linear rhythm and color harmony transfigured dicey motifs. The delirious "Starry Night" and the hellish "Night Café" attain serenity in their realization, cruising at an altitude of talent beyond imagining.

—Peter Schjeldahl

quin: Ave Chrste," "The Haroun Piano Book, Stage I," and the Sonata for Violin and Piano. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. Sept. 24 at 8. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: "À HUIT"

New York's chamber-music masters, awaiting their wintertime return to the rebuilt Alice Tully Hall, begin their season at the Rose Theatre with an evening devoted to the art of the octet: specifically, examples by Stravinsky, Shostakovich, Françaix, and, of course, Schubert. The performers include the violist Paul Neubauer, the flutist Ransom Wilson, the clarinetist David Shifrin, the bassoonist Peter Kolka, and the Escher String Quartet. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-875-5788. Sept. 25 at 7:30.)

WORDLESS MUSIC: AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC ENSEMBLE

The sharp young New York group—performing two minimalist classics, Philip Glass's String Quartet No. 5 and Ingram Marshall's "Fog Tropes II"—shares a bill with the ambient-electronica artists Deaf Center (from Norway) and Library Tapes (from Sweden), at (Le) Poisson Rouge. (158 Bleecker St. 212-505-3474. Sept. 26 at 7:30.)

BROOKLYN CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

Brownstone Brooklyn—intimate, neighborly, human scale—is an ideal destination for chamber music. This group, headed by the violinist Carmit Zori, is based at First Unitarian Church, where it next offers a program of works by Schumann (the "Fantasy Pieces," Op. 73), Dohnányi (the very Brahmsian Piano Quintet in C Minor), and Richard Danielpour; the violinist Todd Phillips and the pianist Anne-Marie McDermott, among others, assist. (Pierrepont St. at Monroe Pl. 718-858-0718. Sept. 26 at 8.)

NEW JUILLIARD ENSEMBLE

Joel Sachs's group, always keen on presenting new music from around the globe, embarks on a program featuring world and New York premieres of such works as the "Juilliard Concerto," by Roumen Balyozov (from Bulgaria), and "Sprechgesang," by Jonathan Harvey (from Great Britain); the evening closes with "Bring Them Home!" by the great American maverick Frederic Rzewski (currently residing in Belgium). (Peter Jay Sharp Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Sept. 27 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

COMPOSER PORTRAIT: PETER LIEBERSON

One of George Steel's great achievements at Columbia University's Miller Theatre was to make that academic standby—the modernist new-music concert—seem alive again. First off this year is a concert by an impromptu "Garuda Ensemble" (featuring such Gotham regulars as the flutist Tara Helen O'Connor, the hornist William Purvis, and the pianist Stephen Gosling) of works by the acclaimed Buddhist composer, whose magical "Neruda Songs" won him the Grawemeyer Award. This intimate program features a broad range of works, including the "Flute Variations" (1971) and "Ziji" (1987). (Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Sept. 27 at 8.)

BROOKLYN FRIENDS OF CHAMBER MUSIC

The young, prize-winning Alianza String Quartet (partnered with a comparative veteran, the pianist Eric Huebner) opens the series' twenty-first season with performances of works by Mozart (the "Dissonant" Quartet), Bartók, Dvořák (the Piano Quintet), and Harold Meltzer (the world premiere of "Paraphrases"). (Lafayette Ave. Presbyterian Church, Lafayette Ave. at Oxford St. Sept. 28 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

DAVID GREILSAMMER

The dynamic young Israeli pianist, who has strong links to Paris and New York, comes to the recently opened music club (Le) Poisson Rouge for a solo recital of works by Bach, Brahms, Schoenberg, Cage, and Mozart (of which he is a scintillating interpreter). A cash bar awaits your patronage. (158 Bleecker St. 212-796-0741. Sept. 28 at 7:30.)

AMERICAN MODERN ENSEMBLE

Robert Paterson's rambunctious little group, holding fast to its corner of the New York scene, offers "Women Who Rock," a program featuring a panoply of works by such talented female composers as Missy Mazzoli, Alexandra du Bois, Gabriela Frank, and Augusta Read Thomas ("Passion Players"). (Times Center, 242 W. 41st St. 800-272-9533. Sept. 29 at 7:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

CHOKE

Clark Gregg wrote, directed, and co-stars in this adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's novel, about a sex addict and scam artist who seeks to learn his father's identity. Starring Sam Rockwell, Anjelica Huston, and Kelly Macdonald. Opening Sept. 26. (In limited release.)

EAGLE EYE

D. J. Caruso directed this thriller, starring Shia LaBeouf, Michelle Monaghan, Rosario Dawson, Anthony Mackie, and Billy Bob Thornton, about a killer who lures two people into an assassination plot. Opening Sept. 26. (In wide release.)

THE LUCKY ONES

Rachel McAdams, Michael Peña, and Tim Robbins star in this drama, directed by Neil Burger, about three Iraq-war veterans thrown together on an accidental cross-country road trip. Opening Sept. 26. (In wide release.)

MIRACLE AT ST. ANNA

Spike Lee directed this drama, about four black American soldiers fighting in Italy during the Second World War. Starring Derek Luke, Michael Ealy, Omar Benson Miller, and Laz Alonso. Opening Sept. 26. (In wide release.)

NIGHTS IN RODANTHE

A drama, directed by George C. Wolfe, about a doctor (Richard Gere) who meets a lonely woman (Diane Lane) in a hotel. Co-starring James Franco and Scott Glenn. Opening Sept. 26. (In wide release.)

OBSCENE

A documentary about the publisher Barney Rosset, directed by Neil Ortenberg and Daniel O'Connor. Opening Sept. 26. (Cinema Village.)

SMOTHER

Diane Keaton stars in this comedy, about a woman who leaves her husband and moves in with her grown son (Dax Shepard). Co-starring Liv Tyler and Mike White; directed by Vince Di Meglio. Opening Sept. 26. (Empire 25 and Village Theatre VII.)

WILD COMBINATION

Matt Wolf directed this documentary, about the musician Arthur Russell. Opening Sept. 26. (IFC Center.)

NOW PLAYING

APPALOOSA

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

BURN AFTER READING

This very black comedy by the Coen brothers is set in the pale-white light of a rather blanched Washington, D.C., an uninspiring and uncomfortable place in which everyone betrays everyone and the tone veers between icy politeness and spitting rage and then back again. The movie has abundant momentum—short, tightly knit scenes of people arguing, driving around, screwing, and fighting—but the farcical plot is so bleak and unfunny that it freezes your responses after about forty-five minutes. Frances McDormand is the gym administrator who thinks she needs money for extensive work on her face, arms, and tummy so she can meet better guys through an Internet dating service; Brad Pitt is her friend, a feckless, pre-sexual child who is constantly sucking on a water bottle. The two haplessly try to blackmail a canned, choleric C.I.A. agent (John Malkovich), and they cross paths with a variety of other lost people, including George Clooney's lightweight Lothario, a U.S. marshal who would sleep with a butterfly. Some of the actors show great professional skill, but the meanness of the entire conception is tiresome. The movie is the most emotionally stunted work of the brothers' career to date. With Tilda Swinton and Richard Jenkins.—David Denby (9/15/08) (In wide release.)

THE DUCHESS

A slice from the life of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire (Keira Knightley), who, we are told, cut a swath through English high society in the second half of the eighteenth century. The swath, as represented

in Saul Dibb's film, seems less than formidable; the heroine's political acumen is displayed early on, in repartee at dinner, but then left largely to wilt, and her most memorable social appearance is a drunken stagger, during which her hedge-size wig catches fire. Ralph Fiennes plays her husband in a clever and, one suspects, accurate portrayal of a chilly pragmatist bent on producing an heir. If there is dullness at the heart of the film, that may be due less to the director (though he should have cut it by a good ten minutes) than to the source material; attempts to link Georgiana's story with a broken royal marriage of more recent vintage are tendentious at best. The most diverting character is Lady Elizabeth Foster (Hayley Atwell), the Duke's mistress, who moved in to create a ménage à trois, and who should have been the heroine of this movie. Atwell is bewitching enough to have held it in her spell. With Charlotte Rampling and, as Charles James Fox, a sly Simon McBurney.—*Anthony Lane* (In wide release.)

THE FAMILY THAT PREYS

The writer and director Tyler Perry, a savvy businessman (he owns all his films outright) who knows his audience (predominately Christian African-Americans), serves up another mediocre, mawkish chapter of his family-first movies. This one concerns two Southern matriarchs (Alfre Woodard and Kathy Bates) who laugh, cry, and wheedle their way through their problems. The film is boilerplate Perry: strong female characters (some selfish, some generous), soap-opera high jinks, and a love-will-find-a-way dénouement. The script is preposterous (a greedy daughter's comeuppance is portrayed in such broad strokes that the resolution feels trite and dishonest), but Bates and Woodard give lively performances that help it glide along, and Perry photographs everyone in a lovely amber light, which masks the thinly conceived characters in a sappy glow.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

GERTRUD

Moving at the gravely impassioned pace of a symphonic adagio, Carl Theodor Dreyer's last film, from 1964, is a paean to love—a subject it exalts with lyrical rapture and parses with philosophical precision. It opens with its title character (Nina Pens Rode), an opera singer of a certain age, telling her husband (Bendt Rothe), a renowned lawyer about to be named a cabinet minister, that she will leave him for a poor young composer. The story is the stuff of melodrama, but the controlled fury of Dreyer's method raises it to grand tragedy—most of all, in the homecoming of Gertrud's first lover (Ebbe Rode), a poet of sexual liberation, now fifty, fastidious, and nostalgic. Filming their reunion in a pair of stupendous, deeply moving long takes (one running nearly ten minutes), Dreyer transcends their pleasure and pain to capture the eternal anguish of time passing and death approaching. Explicitly set during Freud's heyday and referring to experiments with hypnosis and dreams, Dreyer's drama depicts a world in which repressed carnal desire takes the place of the inevitably frustrated spiritual one that Gertrud expresses and embodies: the longing for a love so total and consuming that it contains the seeds of its own destruction. In Danish.—*Richard Brody* (MOMA; Sept. 25 and Sept. 28.)

LAKEVIEW TERRACE

Neil LaBute's latest film, written by David Loughery and Howard Korder, is hard to place. It begins as a seething social drama, with the arrival of a mixed-race couple (Patrick Wilson and Kerry Washington) in a placid, law-abiding corner of Los Angeles. Here they bump up against their next-door neighbor, Abel Turner (Samuel L. Jackson), a policeman of implacable pride and prejudice. Jackson revels in the role, lordling it over the other characters and turning the tale into a comedy of aggression and unease; you can sense the pleasure that he and LaBute derive from jostling the audience's racial at-

titudes. It's a shame, then, that the latter stages of the movie let us off the hook, settling for the contrivances and showdowns of a standard thriller; the setup seemed both more potent and more plausible when it was allowed to simmer. With Regine Nehy, who plays Abel's teen-age daughter with the perfect blend of languor and defiance, and who deserves to go far.—*A.L.* (9/22/08) (In wide release.)

MISTER FOE

David Mackenzie's new film, like its predecessors "Asylum" (2005) and "Young Adam" (2003), is never less than twisted and involved. Set largely in Edinburgh, it stars Jamie Bell as a troubled teen-ager named Hallam Foe; his troubles began, we soon learn, when his mother committed suicide, and the movie shows him not so much coming to terms with her death as immersing himself in her memory and, disastrously, finding some way to revive her. That means wearing her clothes and makeup and spying on a colleague from work (Sophia Myles) who resembles her—all of which feels disarmingly credible, although viewers may lose patience as the look-alike takes Hallam into her bed. The incestuous air of the tale spreads beyond the sexual, as when we see the kid burgling his own home or driving a wedge between his father, Julius (Ciarán Hinds), and Verity (Claire Forlani), the woman who is now stealing Julius's heart. The film is shifty and restless to the eye, almost adolescently keen to strip its characters bare, and we feel Hallam's exasperation as Bell, the hero of "Billy Elliot" (2000), tries once again to stomp the rage out of his system.—*A.L.* (9/8/08) (Angelika Film Center.)

MOVING MIDWAY

This fascinating, touching, and intellectually tough-minded documentary by the former film critic Godfrey Cheshire is about a beautiful house near Raleigh, North Carolina—his family's ancestral home and a former slave plantation—that has accumulated the glories and shame of Southern history within its walls. When the area's rudely expansive commercial devel-

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opment deposits incessant traffic and threatens to place a shopping center at the foot of the property, Cheshire's cousin, the current owner, decides to move Midway Plantation and all its attendant myths (slaves were well treated there; a matriarchal ghost, flitting about the rooms, lays claim to an aristocratic lineage derived from Charlemagne) to a new plot of land some miles away. The move brings to light a separate stream of the family, derived from the affair of a great-grandfather and an African-American cook, and black and white relatives, hitherto unknown to one another, gather together. Along the way, Cheshire deconstructs "The Birth of a Nation" and "Gone with the Wind."—D.D. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

RIGHTEOUS KILL

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

A SECRET

Three generations of a French Jewish family as they haunt the memory and emotions of a young man (Mathieu Amalric). Claude Miller's movie, based on "Memory," a novel by Philippe Grimbert, begins in sunshine as the hero, a young boy in the nineteen-fifties, contemplates his goddess mother (Cécile De France) standing on a diving board. What he doesn't know is that all sorts of erotic intrigues swirled around her during the German Occupation and meshed disastrously with the French collaboration. Miller gives us fascinating glimpses

break the film's sad and gentle tempo. In Mandarin, Farsi, and English.—B.D. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TRAITOR

Part thriller, part moral drama, and only so-so either way. Don Cheadle is Samir Horn, a Muslim raised in Chicago who served in the U.S. special services but then "went over" to Islamic terrorists who are planning attacks on America. At least, that's what Clayton (Guy Pearce), a persistent and highly airborne counter-terrorism specialist in the F.B.I., thinks. Despite its fresh settings (it was shot in Morocco and Marseilles, as well as in Chicago) and its view of how terrorists recruit and train people and talk to one another, the movie has the familiar form of some-



The rabble-rousing youngsters in Old Crow Medicine Show bring their foot-stomping music to Webster Hall for a pair of concerts.

ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS

Howard Hawks's stirring tale of a fledgling airmail service that traverses the Andes from a strip in a South American banana port is the ultimate workplace dramedy. Hawks weaves brawny romance and humor and a man's-man sort of heartbreak into his tribute to the ideal of vocation; the risky job of lifting mail over and through the mountains becomes a crucible of character, group feeling, and sexual loyalty. Cary Grant delivers a robust, carnal performance as the flyboys' boss, and Jean Arthur is skittishly charming as an entertainer waiting for a boat out of town; Grant emits an electric charge when he starts to take her seriously. Hawks surrounds these two actors with a jaunty ensemble, including the impossibly pretty young Rita Hayworth, as Grant's prior flame, and the cagey Thomas Mitchell, as his best friend and right-hand man. As Hayworth's husband, a top aviator with a tainted past, Richard Barthelmess is haunted and moving. The script is by Jules Furthman, an ace in his own right.—Michael Sragow (MOMA; Sept. 17 and Sept. 20.)

PINEAPPLE EXPRESS

It's a two-guys-on-the-run action comedy, based on an old idea by Judd Apatow, who also co-produced. Seth Rogen, a process server in a suit, witnesses a drug rubout; James Franco, Seth's pot dealer, knows the murderer, who goes in pursuit of the two of them with his pals. Both men are stoned all the time, and have to keep reminding themselves, in long, muzzy conversations that are an important part of the picture, that they are actually in serious trouble. The movie, directed by David Gordon Green, has an odd, interesting stop-and-go rhythm. The violence is perpetrated with the means at hand—bongs, lamps, coffeepots—and people often apologize for the damage they are doing. The big shoot-out and explosion at the end, however, are depressingly conventional. With Danny R. McBride as an exceptionally slippery drug distributor who takes a lot of punishment. Written by Rogen and Evan Goldberg.—D.D. (In wide release.)

of the family's life in both prosperous and straitened times—the movie opens up French Jewish life in a way never before seen in this country. In French.—D.D. (IFC Center and Paris.)

A SONG IS BORN

Remaking, in 1948, his own 1941 comedy, "Ball of Fire," about a professor who leaves the mansion where he's been holed up for years and, in search of the vernacular, meets and falls for a showgirl, the director Howard Hawks didn't just change actors (replacing Gary Cooper with Danny Kaye and Barbara Stanwyck with Virginia Mayo) and replace black-and-white with Technicolor. He also, decisively, altered the central metaphor, from the writing of books to the recording of a set of records, which allowed him to exchange excess verbiage for lively performance numbers by Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Lionel Hampton, and a host of other jazz stars. It also gave rise to the greatest comic set piece of Hawks's great career, a sixteen-minute poker-faced musical romp through cultural politics, starting with Brahms's Clarinet Quintet and moving to a ribald anthropological sendup—a "Polynesian love chant" in which Professor Frisbee (Kaye) dances with his old-maid benefactor in "the native position." Though the script-bound comedy can't do much for an encore, Hawks at least rushes through the indifferent material with a mandarin indifference.—R.B. (BAM; Sept. 24.)

A THOUSAND YEARS OF GOOD PRAYERS

There isn't a missed beat in Wayne Wang's new film, a quiet symphony about a distant Chinese father (Henry O) visiting his newly divorced daughter (Faye Yu) in America, where he befriends an elderly Iranian woman (Vida Ghahremani). The title of the film refers to an old proverb about what it takes for a father and daughter to truly communicate, and the film reflects a solemn, almost churchlike atmosphere that's both contemplative and soothing. Wang's concerns are modest: gently prodding the cultural and generational issues between father and daughter, he avoids any histrionic scenes that would

thing like "Sleeper Cell," a Showtime series from 2005-06 about an African-American Muslim who penetrates a terrorist group in Los Angeles, or of an undercover-cop picture like "Donnie Brasco," in which the good-guy hero enters the Mafia and has to decide whether to take part in crimes in order to sustain his credibility among the hoods. The acting is generally solid, though the terrorist leaders, when you meet them, are suave in the manner of Hollywood Nazis from 1942, who ran art galleries, wore silk dressing gowns, and spoke in the most cultivated tones. With Said Taghmaoui, as Omar, an ardent Moroccan terrorist.—D.D. (9/1/08) (In wide release.)

TROUBLE THE WATER

Just before Katrina, a former drug dealer and would-be rapper named Kimberly Roberts, possessed of a new digital camera, decided to stay in her New Orleans house with her husband and take some pictures. The footage, shot from the attic as the water creeps higher, is a chaotic but terrifyingly expressive struggle to record what's going on without dying, the ultimate in existential filmmaking: I shoot, therefore I am. The footage later fell into the hands of the filmmaking team of Carl Deal and Tia Lessin, who recorded Kimberly's return to the mud-carpeted, wrecked neighborhood, two weeks after the storm, and surrounded her story with testimony from survivors. In the end, "trampling over tribulations," as she puts it, Kimberly performs a rap song that reveals her earlier life—a kind of "Song of Myself" that feels fully justified as an anthem of endurance. This movie, along with Spike Lee's "When the Levees Broke," is one of the essential Katrina documents.—D.D. (9/15/08) (In limited release.)

24 CITY

Upon hearing that a vast industrial complex in Chengdu was being torn down to make way for a high-rise compound of apartments and office buildings, the Chinese director Jia Zhangke recognized the event's element of high drama. Blending fiction with documentary, interviewing several retired workers and scripting faux interviews with other characters,

KYLE T. WEBSTER

he brings huge stretches of long-repressed history to life on an intimate scale. Earlier generations' unfathomable hardships emerge (an elderly woman recounts losing her child in a crowd and being forced aboard a work transport by "comrades"), together with quiet accusations of the system that is responsible for them. The pleasure of retirees singing kitschy Communist songs contrasts painfully with the benumbed uniformity that afflicts them still. Yet the workers' descendants, modern young individualists who rejected factory labor in favor of becoming a real-estate developer, a TV commentator, or a personal shopper, come off no more fulfilled, in an age in which the tight margins of Chinese freedom are reserved for profit. Jia, filming with a calm, probing ruefulness, quietly unlocks the floodgates of memory as a crucial first step toward personal and political liberation. With Joan Chen, as a factory worker said by her colleagues to resemble the actress Joan Chen. In Mandarin.—R.B. (New York Film Festival; Sept. 27.)

THE WOMEN

A remake of George Cukor's film of 1939, with the screen once more denuded of men. The title is unchanged, and so are the names of many characters, together with their bottomless reserves of cash; we are plunged as before into a marital crisis, with Mary Haines (Meg Ryan, taking over the Norma Shearer role) discovering that her husband has been seeing a shopgirl. The part of the temptress, played formerly by Joan Crawford, now goes to Eva Mendes, so at least the new version gains something in credibility. Apart from that, it is a poor travesty of the original, with one dud zinger after another sinking to the floor, the air thick with either vengeance or gratification, and the entire cast—save Candice Bergen and Cloris Leachman, experienced hands who know how to rise above disaster—looking unmistakably ill at ease. (The writer and director is Diane English, who worked with Bergen on the TV series "Murphy Brown.") The fashion show, slotted into Cukor's monochrome movie as a classy yet lengthy flourish of color, has now been shifted toward the end, but it doesn't help. With Annette Bening, Jada Pinkett Smith, and Debra Messing.—A.L. (9/22/08) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

BATTLE IN SEATTLE: Angelika Film Center. **ELITE SQUAD:** Sunshine Cinema. **GHOST TOWN:** In wide release. **TOWELHEAD:** In limited release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Vojtech Jasný. All films are in Czech unless otherwise noted. Sept. 24 at 7: "Desire" (1958). ♦ Sept. 24 at 9: "Gladys" (1999; in English). ♦ Sept. 25 at 7: "All My Good Countrymen" (1968). ♦ Sept. 25 at 9:15: "I Survived Certain Death" (1960). ♦ Special screenings. Sept. 25 at 6:30: "Bitter and Sweet" (1995, Lee Myung-Se; in Korean). ♦ Sept. 28 at 7:30: Short films by Dean Snider, including "No Nothing Woman" (1984). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Sept. 26 at 7 and 9: "Man with a Movie Camera" (1929, Dziga Vertov; silent, with Russian intertitles). ♦ Sept. 27-28 at 5:30: "L'Atalante" (1934, Jean Vigo; in French).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—The films of Howard Hawks. Sept. 24 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "A Song Is Born" (†). ♦ Sept. 25 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "I Was a Male War Bride" (1949). ♦ Sept. 26 at 3, 6, and 9: "Only Angels Have Wings" (†). ♦ Sept. 27 at 2, 4:30, and 6:50: "The Big Sleep" (1946). ♦ Sept. 28 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Monkey Business" (1952). ♦ Sept. 29 at 6 and 9: "The Big Sky" (1952). ♦ Sept. 30 at 6 and 9: "Sergeant York" (1941).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Sept. 24-25 at 1, 4:45, and 8:35: "The Godfather, Part II" (1974, Francis Ford Coppola). ♦ Sept. 26, Sept. 28, and Sept. 30 at 1 and 8:20 and Sept. 27

and Sept. 29 at 4:45: "The Godfather" (1972, Coppola). ♦ The films of David Lean. Sept. 24 at 2 and 7: "Doctor Zhivago" (1965). ♦ Sept. 25 at 1, 4:20, and 7:40: "A Passage to India" (1984). ♦ In revival. Sept. 26-Oct. 2 at 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, and 9:50: "Alexander Nevsky" (1938, Sergei Eisenstein; in Russian).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Special screening. Sept. 30 at 7: "Love Neutral" (2005, Pierre Coulibeuf) and "Balkan Baroque" (1999, Coulibeuf), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—In revival. Sept. 26-28 at 11 A.M.: "The Magician" (1958, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Sept. 26-27: "The Trip" (1967, Roger Corman). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. "What Remains: The Life and Work of Sally Mann" (2005, Steve Cantor), introduced by the director.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Sept. 24-26 at 1:30: "My Favorite Wife" (1940, Garson Kanin). ♦ A tribute to Pierre Rissient. Sept. 24 at 4:30: "Pierre Rissient: Man of Cinema" (2007, Todd McCarthy). ♦ A tribute to Carlos Reygadas. Sept. 24 and Sept. 26 at 6, Sept. 25 at 8:45, Sept. 27 at 2, Sept. 28 at 4:30, and Sept. 29 at 8: "Silent Light" (2007, Reygadas; in Plautdietsch and Spanish). ♦ Sept. 24 at 8:30 and Sept. 27 at 4:30: "Japón" (2002, Reygadas; in Spanish). ♦ Sept. 26 at 8:30 and Sept. 29 at 6: "Ordet" (1954-55, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish). ♦ Sept. 27-28 at 7: "Bat-

2: "The Man from London" (2007, Béla Tarr; in French and English). ♦ Sept. 25 at 6 and Sept. 28 at 2: "Gertrud" (†). The Sept. 25 screening will be introduced by the producer and writer, James Schamus, and preceded by a book signing with Schamus.

NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL

Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—Screenings are held at a variety of venues. For complete program information, visit www.filmnyc.com. Sept. 26 at 8 and 9: "The Class" (2008, Laurent Cantet; in French). ♦ Sept. 27 at noon and Sept. 28 at 6:15: "Hunger" (2008, Steve McQueen). ♦ Sept. 27 at 3: "24 City" (†). ♦ Sept. 27 at 6:15: "Happy-Go-Lucky" (2008, Mike Leigh). ♦ Sept. 27 at 9:30 and Sept. 28 at 3:15: "Wendy and Lucy" (2008, Kelly Reichardt). ♦ Sept. 28 at 9 and Sept. 29 at 6: "I'm Gonna Explode" (2008, Gerardo Naranjo; in Spanish). ♦ Sept. 29 at 9:15 and Sept. 30 at 6: "Tony Manero" (2008, Pablo Larraín; in Spanish). ♦ Sept. 30 at 9:15: "The Northern Land" (2008, João Botelho; in Portuguese). ♦ The films of Nagisa Oshima. Except where noted, all films are in Japanese. Sept. 27 at 11 A.M. and Sept. 29 at 6:15: "Cruel Story of Youth" (1960). ♦ Sept. 27 at 3 and Sept. 29 at 4:30 and 8:15: "A Town of Love and Hope" (1959). ♦ Sept. 27 at 4:45 and Sept. 30 at 8:30: "Night and Fog in Japan" (1960). ♦ Sept. 27 at 7: "Diary of a Shinjuku Thief" (1968). ♦ Sept. 27 at 9: "Pleasures of the Flesh" (1965). ♦ Sept. 27 at midnight: "In the Realm of the Senses" (1976). ♦ Sept. 28 at 12:30: "The Man Who Left His Will on Film" (1970). ♦ Sept. 28 at 2:30 and Sept. 30 at 4:30: "The Sun's Burial" (1960). ♦ Sept. 28 at 4:30: "Empire of

TABLES FOR TWO I SODI



105 Christopher St., at Bleecker St. (212-414-5774)—September brings Fashion Week, in which a large white tent swallows Bryant Park, recalling the quarantine scene from "E.T.," and Chipotle-munching earthlings are expelled by alien forces from the planet Cipriani. If you could take the appealing things about it—beauty, taste, social energy—and leave behind the annoying ones—long waits, stupid prices, jerks—you might come up with something like I Sodi, the West Village restaurant run by Rita Sodi, who moved to New York from Florence last year, after decades working for Calvin Klein Jeans. Christopher Street is a "directional" choice, to use the industry euphemism, but the S. & M. sidewalk scene only makes the place, once you're inside, feel like more of a haven. Sodi, the platinum-spike-haired proprietress, is often at the bar, treating it like her kitchen table, and her casual air—one night, she and some friends were hacking away at a watermelon—is contagious. The young sommelier, Håkan Westergren, and Mark Dorsey, his wised-up sidekick, are smart, funny, and generous with the post-meal grappa. They're also generous with those who have partaken too much of their generosity. One night, Dorsey offered a home remedy for hiccups: a lemon dunked in bitters, dipped in sugar. It worked.

The menu at I Sodi is small, rotating, and more than ably executed by the chef Michael Genardini, who has cooked at L'Impero and Alto. (Even so, he's likely never had such a gorgeous kitchen. I Sodi, all pine and tiles, could be the setting for a fantasy Tuscan cooking school.) His lasagna is traditional but sophisticated, with a woody top layer that brings to mind chocolate or mushrooms more than boring old hamburger. Strong savory flavors also come through in the tortelli—piny sachets of parmigiano—and the *coniglio in padella*—fall-apart rabbit, simmered in white wine and garnished with whole black olives. *Galetto schiacciato*, a Cornish hen smooched with a brick, halved, and splayed, resembles a Rorschach blot, though it's hard to interpret it as anything but a good dinner. For dessert, an especially wise choice is the blackberry tart, which has an unexpected gingerbread kick. Order it, as long as Richard Johnson, a maître d', hasn't already snuck you spoonfuls of *stracciata* gelato. By day, he's a criminal attorney. If I Sodi is an example, he'd do just fine with a second career. (Open weekdays for dinner and weekends for lunch and dinner. Entrées \$19-\$38.)

—Lauren Collins

tle in Heaven" (2005, Reygadas; in Spanish). ♦ "Hollywood on the Hudson: Filmmaking in New York, 1920-39." Sept. 24 at 6:45: "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" (1926, Frank Tuttle; silent). ♦ Sept. 25 at 6 and Sept. 29 at 8: "Janice Meredith" (1924, E. Mason Hoppe; silent). ♦ Sept. 26 at 8:30: "Enchantment" (1921, Robert Vignola; silent). ♦ Sept. 27 at 1 and Sept. 29 at 6: "Monsieur Beaucaire" (1924, Sidney Olcott; silent). ♦ Sept. 27 at 3: "While New York Sleeps" (1920, Charles Brabin; silent). ♦ Sept. 27 at 6: "The Struggle" (1931, D. W. Griffith). ♦ Sept. 28 at 2: "The Letter" (1929, Jean De Limur and Monta Bell; silent). ♦ Special screenings. Sept. 22 at

Passion" (1978). ♦ Sept. 28 at 6:45: "Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence" (1983). ♦ Sept. 28 at 9:15: "Taboo" (1999). ♦ Sept. 30 at 6:20: "The Catch" (1961).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Sept. 26 at 9:30: "Big Night" (1996, Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—Through Nov. 2: "Paul Schrader's Personal Choice." Sept. 28 at 3:15 and 8: "An Autumn Afternoon" (1962, Yasujiro Ozu; in Japanese). ♦ Sept. 28 at 5:30: "Hardcore" (1979, Schrader).

READINGS AND TALKS

LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM

Recently, students at the Urban Academy High School, a public school in Manhattan, were instructed in the finer points of writing and interviewing by representatives from the NY Writers Coalition, StoryCorps, and the New Orleans Neighborhood Story Project. Eight young women from the school have had their impressions of their neighborhoods published in the collection "From Kingsbridge to Canarsie," which they read from here on Sept. 25 at 6:30. (108 Orchard St. No tickets necessary.)

ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI

The poet reads from and discusses his work with Alice Quinn, the executive director of the Poetry Society of America. (Lillian Vernon Creative Writers House, New York University, 58 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary. Sept. 25 at 7.)

NEW SCHOOL

Sept. 25 at 7: David Lehman, the series editor of "The Best American Poetry," joins Charles Wright, who selected the poems for the 2008 edition of the book, for a reading from the new volume. John Ashbery, Mary Karr, and many others will participate. ♦ Sept. 27: The university marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Vladimir Nabokov's "Lolita," with a daylong symposium on the novel and its legacy. (66 W. 12th St. For more information, visit www.newschooledu.edu.)

POETS HOUSE

The downtown library and literary center, which is about to open a new home in Battery Park City, turns its attention to poetry and architecture with its "Form and Function" program. A

day of readings and talks is planned, including a conversation between the architect Lebbeus Woods, whose drawings are currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art, and the poet Susan Stewart. (Center for Architecture, 536 LaGuardia Pl. For a complete schedule, visit www.poetshouse.org. Sept. 27, starting at 11:30 A.M.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

"PRELUDE '08"

This annual festival offers a free sampling of the upcoming downtown theatre season. The four-day event features more than twenty new works, by Richard Foreman, Big Art Group, and other performers and companies at the cutting edge. (Martin E. Segal Theatre, City University of New York Graduate Center, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. Sept. 24-27. For more information, visit www.preludenyc.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

After the sumptuous pleasures of Asian art, attention turns to the more tight-lipped attractions of Americana. On Sept. 24, Sotheby's offers a general sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculpture, anchored by two private collections, both rich in American Impressionist works. The focus moves to furniture, folk art, and silver on Sept. 26, beginning with the collection of Rear Admiral Edward P. Moore, which includes not only a significant selection of Early American furniture but also a version of Edward Hicks's "Peaceable Kingdom" (one of approximately sixty the artist made in his lifetime). The larger sale of Americana the same day is led by a highly ornate, intricately carved Chippendale mahogany dressing table, made in Philadelphia in the

seventeen-sixties. In the midst of this sober company, the house slips in a sale of extravagant jewels (Sept. 25) with a large group of mid-twentieth-century pieces, many by Cartier, as well as the usual cascades of diamonds. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ Christie's divides its American sales into two categories, fine art and applied, both of which go on the auction block on Sept. 25. The largest group of paintings here is from the early twentieth century, with works by Martha Walter, Philip Howard Evergood, Walt Kuhn, and Jared French leading the way. The afternoon is devoted to fine furniture (plus folk art and maritime paintings) and is led by yet another "Peaceable Kingdom." (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ Swann offers a large group of sporting prints (mainly hunting scenes) by the Salem-born, Paris-trained Impressionist Frank W. Benson as part of its Sept. 23 auction of American prints. It is followed, on Sept. 25, by a sale of autographs, including an exhibition poster signed by Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ Doyle holds its fall showcase of decorative arts of the Belle Époque (Sept. 25), with such whimsical items as a peacock-inspired table mirror by Tiffany in bronze and Favre glass and a seven-foot-tall music box made in Leipzig (including disks). (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

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ON THE HORIZON

ART MOONSTRUCK

Oct. 2-Jan. 4

The paintings of Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919) are often eclipsed by his story—the self-taught New Yorker began to exhibit at the age of twenty, but descended into madness and was institutionalized. "The Unknown Blakelock," at the National Academy Museum, emphasizes little-known areas of his oeuvre; it includes Native American and Caribbean scenes, still-lives, and near-Expressionist works. (212-369-4880.)

MOVIES ITALIAN RAPSCALLION

Oct. 3-9

Postwar Italy turned out movies, high and low, by the skein, and the comedian Alberto Sordi was one of its most popular heroes. Film Forum presents his work with Federico Fellini as well as war-themed comedies and early-seventies farce. (212-727-8110.)

THE THEATRE IN HIS ELEMENT

Oct. 3

Jeremy Piven, best known as the ruthless agent Ari Gold in "Entourage," joins Raúl Esparza ("Pushing Daisies")

and Elisabeth Moss ("Mad Men") in David Mame's "Speed-the-Plow," at the Barrymore. The dark comedy about Hollywood producers is directed by Neil Pepe, the artistic director of the Atlantic Theatre Company. (212-239-6200.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC GOING HOME

Oct. 20

The Canadian soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian—a fine Susanna at the Met—is proud of her Armenian heritage. She teams up with the conductor Anne Manson to explore the music of Gomidas—the Sibelius of Armenia—in

a concert at Zankel Hall. (212-247-7800.)

NIGHT LIFE BRAGGING TIME

Oct. 25

The English folkie Billy Bragg, who plays the Manhattan Center's Grand Ballroom, is inspired by politics as much as he is by matters of the heart. In this election season he'll be sure to deliver rousing renditions of songs from his back catalogue, as well as from his latest album, "Mr. Love & Justice." (212-307-7171.)

Alberto Sordi's "The White Sheik," at Film Forum.

THE NEW YORKER Festival

October 3|4|5

New York City

Tickets Still Available

Fiction:

"Writing About Home," with **Sana Krasikov**, **Yiyun Li**, and **Manil Suri**.

"Outlaws," with **Peter Carey**, **Hari Kunzru**, and **Gary Shteyngart**.

Fashion:

The Next Generation of Fashion—top graduates from three of the world's premier design programs discuss and show their upcoming work.

Film:

Guillermo del Toro talks with **Daniel Zalewski**.

Saturday Night Sneak Preview of **"Frontrunners,"** followed by a conversation with the film's creative team.

Special Screening of **"Fear(s) of the Dark,"** followed by a conversation with two of the film's directors, **Charles Burns** and **Lorenzo Mattotti**.

Music:

Dawn Upshaw talks with **Alex Ross**.

Tom Morello talks with **James Surowiecki**—a conversation with music.

A New Yorker Dance Party with **Ghislain Poirier**.

Dance:

Alexei Ratmansky talks with **Joan Acocella**.

Issues:

The New Yorker Town Hall Meeting—Race and Class in America. With **Barbara Ehrenreich**, **Thomas Frank**, **John McWhorter**, **Leslie Sanchez**, and **Cornel West**.
Moderated by **David Remnick**.

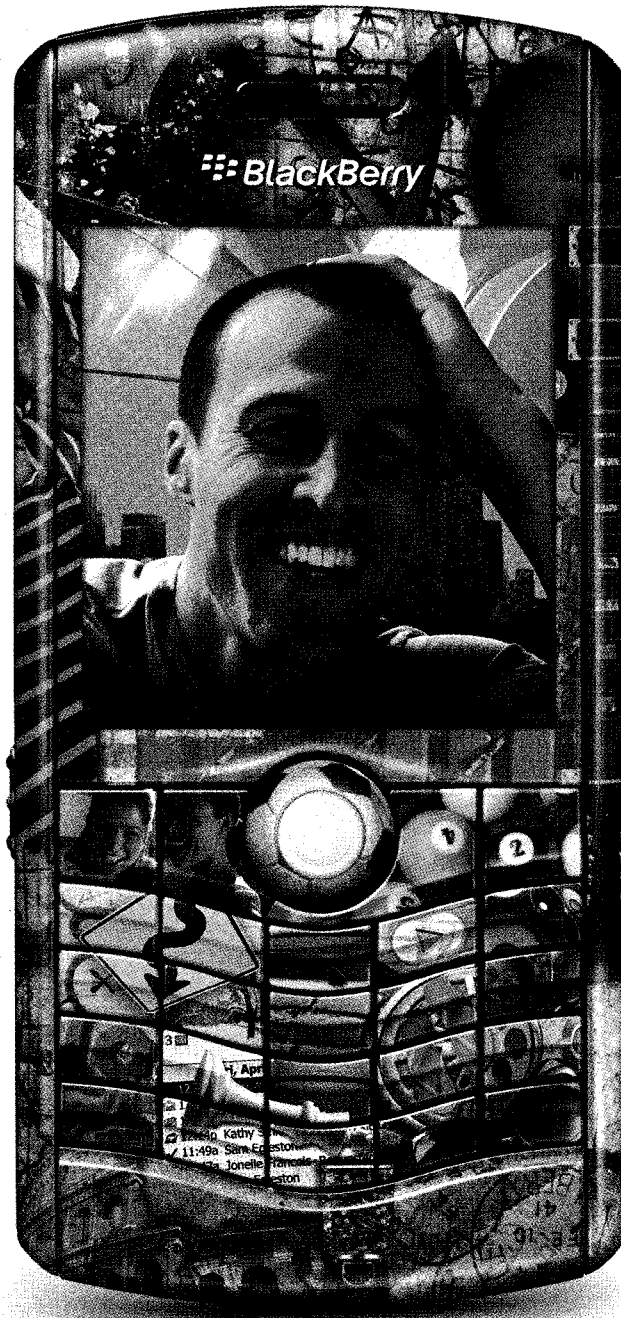
Elizabeth Edwards talks with **Dr. Atul Gawande** on health care.

Tickets are now available at festival.newyorker.com, or by calling 800-440-6974.

Please note: Tickets will also be sold during Festival weekend, October 3rd through October 5th, at event doors, and at Festival HQ, 125 West 18th Street. For more information, go to festival.newyorker.com.



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT BAILING OUT



If Barack Obama is victorious on November 4th, someone on his transition team should send inauguration tickets to Richard Fuld, the chairman and chief executive of Lehman Brothers. For months, Obama had struggled to promote the sense—which was not altogether confirmed by the official statistics—that the economy was in real trouble. Back in March, in New York, he gave a thoughtful speech, tracing the sub-prime crisis to lax oversight, and calling for a major overhaul of regulatory policy. The serious newspapers reported the event, and that was that. By Labor Day, the McCain campaign had managed to reframe the economic debate—in as much as there was one—around gas prices, offshore drilling, and Obama's purported plan to raise taxes on ordinary Americans. (Actually, his tax plan would leave more than ninety per cent of households paying less money to the government.) Some polls even showed John McCain outscoring Obama on economic issues.

Enter Fuld. The trouble began during the summer lull on Wall Street, when he neglected to find an outright buyer for his faltering firm. That mistake was followed by the news, on Sep-

tember 9th, that a Korean bank that had considered investing in Lehman was withdrawing. Three days later, the government informed Wall Street that it would not bail out Fuld's firm. Coming less than a week after the U.S. Treasury's takeover of the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the sight of the venerable investment bank filing for Chapter 11 protection spooked the markets, which experienced their biggest drop since 2001. Then, on September 16th, the Federal Reserve extended an eighty-five-billion-dollar loan to American International Group, the largest insurance company in the country, sparking panic on Wall Street. The economy was suddenly at the center of the campaign, which is where it should have been all along.



In the past few days, Obama has had the demeanor of a man who fell out a window and landed on a trampoline; McCain has looked like someone who thought he had won the lottery only to discover, en route to the prize ceremony, that he had been sold a phony ticket. The epizootic in the financial markets resurrected doubts about the wisdom of McCain's decision to pass over the business-minded Mitt Romney as his running mate, a choice that left him to face alone tough questions about economics—his least favorite subject. Last week, McCain restated his belief that the fundamentals of the economy were strong and flip-flopped on the regulation of Wall Street. "How is it supposed to reassure people to hear Mr. McCain intone, as he did yesterday, the words 'derivatives' and 'credit default swaps' as if it's the first time he'd ever heard of them?" the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* wondered.

No matter who wins the election, the economy has undeniably entered a new phase. John Kenneth Galbraith's comment that in America the only respectable type of socialism is socialism for the rich has never seemed more apt. The Treasury Secretary, Henry Paulson, and the Fed chairman, Ben Bernanke, had good reasons for nationalizing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which help provide mortgages to tens of millions of American families. The rescue of A.I.G. was more questionable, but Paulson and Bernanke feared that letting it fail would cause chaos in the global financial system;

hidden inside the insurance company was a financial-products division that had sold other firms all manner of exotic derivatives, including credit-default swaps, which guaranteed the value of bonds. Had A.I.G. gone under, those swaps would have been practically worthless.

Whatever the merits of saving A.I.G., many financial experts agree that the Bush Administration's policy of buying more time for the financial industry to fix itself (at the Fed, this is known as the "finger-in-the-dike strategy") needs supplementing with a direct attack on the slumping property market—the source of all the losses. It was in this context that, last Friday, Paulson announced a plan to have the government relieve the banks and investment banks of their most distressed mortgage assets. The sums involved would be huge—perhaps as much as two trillion dollars, according to Harvard's Kenneth Rogoff, a former chief economist at the International Monetary Fund. (That amount is more than triple the cost of the Iraq war so far.) Marketing such an enormous bailout to the American voters will not be easy, but history demonstrates that often the only way to resolve a collapse in the banking system is for the government to step in and socialize the losses. That is what happened during the savings-and-loan crisis of the late nineteen-eighties, when the government set up the Resolution Trust Corporation to dispose of the assets of insolvent thrifts. The total cleanup cost to the taxpayers, in today's dollars, was nearly two hundred billion.

If Congress goes along with Paulson's plan—and the early indications are that it will—the quid pro quo, at least

for a time, will be more oversight of the financial industry and a witch hunt for the Wall Street chiefs who got us into this mess. The hunt has already begun. Last week, McCain proposed an investigation modelled on the 9/11 Commission, and congressional Democrats scheduled hearings for as early as this week. Many details remain to be uncovered about how firms like Lehman and A.I.G. operated, but McCain and the other lawmakers should also investigate their own roles.

Beginning in 1978, when the Carter Administration abolished government restrictions on airline routes and fares, both parties began to espouse the doctrine of unfettered free markets. In some industries—airlines and telecommunications, for example—deregulation delivered lower prices and more choices, with few downsides. Then the Reagan Administration relaxed parts of the Glass-Steagall Act, a Depression-era law that restricted the activities of big financial firms. This facilitated innovation and growth but also made the system more fragile. A few years later, the Clinton Administration—after heavy lobbying by Wall Street, and vigorous encouragement from Alan Greenspan, then the Fed chairman—removed the last vestiges of Glass-Steagall. (Phil Gramm, the former Texas senator—and a McCain adviser, until he recently referred to Americans as "a nation of whiners"—co-sponsored the key piece of legislation.)

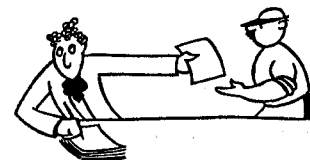
Commercial banks, such as Chase Manhattan, merged with investment banks, such as J. P. Morgan. The remaining Wall Street firms, grappling with new

competition in their traditional businesses, increased their borrowing and made riskier bets. Last year, Bear Stearns, Lehman Brothers, and Merrill Lynch had more than thirty dollars of investments on their books for every dollar of capital. Having borrowed so heavily, the firms were hostage to a withdrawal of credit on the part of their lenders. After the sub-prime-mortgage market collapsed, that was precisely what they faced.

As Obama noted last week, it is no accident that the country is confronting its worst financial crisis since the Depression. Gullibility and greed caused this latest calamity, but what allowed those basic human traits to combine to such catastrophic effect was a legal and institutional framework that resulted from deliberate policy actions. Something new, from a new Administration, is needed. A new deal, you might say.

—John Cassidy

FIRST EDITION DIAL-A-MAG



When it comes to reading material, the thinking these days seems to be that smaller is better: *Rolling Stone*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Post*, and the *Times* have all determined that the only way to survive is to shrink. Michael Merriam, an ex-anthropologist and a former editor of *Time Out Istanbul*, was contemplating this the other day, after putting together the debut issue of *PMc*, the world's first iPhone magazine. Since he started working as editor-in-chief of *PMc*—the name stands for the society photographer Patrick McMullan, its founder and muse—Merriam has spent thousands of hours reading, writing, and editing on his iPhone's three-by-two-inch screen.

"It's a little different, because you're more conscious of the fact that you have to turn the page a lot," he said. "So if I've turned the page six times"—a page of *PMc* has about a hundred and fifty words of text—"I start to feel like, O.K., something has to have happened already." This hasn't been much trouble for the writers who have contributed so far—



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Nicola Kraus ("The Nanny Diaries") wrote "The Electric Porcupine," a tone poem about New York, and Molly Jong-Fast ("The Sex Doctors in the Basement") wrote a piece about the five worst Manhattan trends. Merriam, who is twenty-nine and has messy strawberry-blond hair, believes that you can publish perfectly good articles on a phone. "There just have to be fewer adjectives and adverbs," he said. "Just nouns followed by verbs. I think a Joan Didion sentence—a lot of short sentences—can do that. Joan Didion's sentences don't rely on subordinate clauses." Another plus: when you're reading a restaurant review in a paper magazine, you have to make mental notes—Oh, I should probably call tomorrow and make a reservation. But, when you're reading on your phone, Merriam said, "you just press a button and you're calling."

Recently, during fashion week, Merriam led the way into the tents in Bryant Park, where McMullan, dressed in a loose pin-striped suit, was backstage at the Betsey Johnson show, taking pictures. He had just bagged a shot of Kelly Osbourne. "This is where a photographer is really a photographer," he said, wiping some sweat from his chin. "You don't have time to change the lighting. You have to get it, and then you edit." He zoomed in on a dress with white ruffles. "Now, that is beautiful!" he said. "We may do a piece on ruffles, for example, if I'm seeing a lot of them. It's a photo-driven magazine."

"I shouldn't say this," McMullan continued, after a minute. "But I don't have an iPhone." (He uses an iPod to listen to music; he makes calls on a BlackBerry.) "But *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*—I can't carry them with me anymore. They're like books. Even the *Times* is easier to read on the computer." Betsey Johnson came backstage in a flouncy green dress and sparkly shoes, holding her baby granddaughter. "Patrick!" she said.

"There she is!" McMullan said. "Oh, Betsey! Oh, my God. I've got to get you."

Early the next morning, the magazine's staff was huddled around a computer in McMullan's downtown studio—an old chiropractor's office, with brick walls and vintage Madonna portraits—trying to sort a week's worth of

photographs into categories: "Who You Should Know," "What We Did Last Night," "The Runway." Billy Farrell, a photographer, came in holding a bottle. "Yes, it's a beer," he said. "You don't realize that it's late at night for me."

They scrolled through party pictures: Mena Suvari ("Whose neck is this?"), an arty picture of Jessica Simpson with her hairdresser ("Yes!"), a series showing Justin Timberlake at a Prada party ("I think this would be really cool as a flipbook," Merriam said). Carolina Herrera was dropped. "She's a great designer," Angela Bronza, the deputy editor, said, "but she's in every *Vogue* 'What to Wear When You're Over 60' feature." After a few minutes, Merriam found his favorite shot: a picture, from the Marc Jacobs show, of Victoria Beckham's back. If you zoomed in, and held the phone close to your face, you could read words tattooed between her shoulder blades. "Awesome," he said.

Farrell pointed to some bony parts of Beckham's back. "Can you crop it to get rid of that horrible skeletal shit? Because we're not *Us Weekly*. We don't want to scare people." The editors leaned in close, trying to read the tattoo.

"It's Hebrew," Merriam said.

"It's not Hebrew," Bronza replied. "It's Arabic."

"Maybe it's Cambodian," Maryellen McGrath, a photo editor, said. Merriam took out his phone and found a story about Beckham's tattoo on the Internet. It was Hebrew script: "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." He decided to close the section with it.

—Lizzie Widdicombe

DEPT. OF MAGICAL THINKING WIZ BUCKS



Any attempt to find causation or fault for what happened last week is fraught. So many things have gone wrong; so many people are to blame; so many people are now screwed. Often, the media exaggerates the significance of the ups and downs of the financial markets, while the sophisticates in the marketplace take them in stride. Not this time. Last week, the most farsighted

market players were flabbergasted, even as they comprehended that they were witnessing a capitulation to some kind of greater truth—that Wall Street had got caught up in a pyramid scheme of its own devising. (The market soon recovered its truth aversion by demonizing short-sellers. Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, of New York, called them "looters after a hurricane." Jim Cramer, on



CNBC, took to invoking terrorists. The regulators, here and in London, clamped down. Meanwhile, Bloody Mary, on Bali H'ai, is prescribing happy talk.)

Over the past thirty years, Wall Street has honed the art of creating and selling financial products with an increasingly tenuous connection to reality. It has been an extraordinarily creative period—a modernism of money, with an equivalent trend toward abstraction. Relatively simple derivatives evolved into ever more arcane contrivances. The risk and the leverage piled up, and, in the short term, the billions rolled in. This is over now.

Glenn Greenberg, a value investor who started as an investment banker in the nineteen-seventies, thinks that Wall Street has been chastened. "It's kind of like when you get in a big mess and you say, 'Please, God, if you let me off this time, I'll never do it again,'" he said.

One problem is that the contrivers mistook their art for a science. A pre-modern money manager explained last week, "They looked at it all as a science experiment." They tested each new product—each hypothesis—against a bunch of historical precedents, running computer models to see how the prod-

uct would fare under the conditions of various bygone catastrophes. "The problem was, they didn't have any historical precedent for when it all melts down. The historical precedents they used are not relevant."

In fact, it wasn't science at all. It was more like what anthropologists and psychologists call magical thinking—the tendency to believe that wishing it so makes it so. For years now, people have clung to the conviction that you can have outsized returns with little risk, leverage without recoil. This is what the clever financiers claimed that their inventions could do. Their colleagues and clients wanted to believe them. They all wanted to believe that their credit-default swaps could continue to insure against debt defaults.

It's hard enough to understand credit-default swaps when you know what they are; if you don't know, forget it. But since they are one of several inventions that may sink this city, and maybe the country, into a new era of penury and thrift, if not downright depression, let's have a go: a credit-default swap is a financial contract between one party and another which protects against a default on a debt. The trick on Wall Street has been to negotiate and trade them like crazy; there are sixty-two trillion dollars in credit-default swaps outstanding. The question of their worth has mystified even the druids who created them, especially because, it turns out, the swaps haven't really insured against anything. They are like Wiz bucks, in a world without the Wiz (which is essentially the one we live in, by the way—the electronics chain tanked in 2003).

Magical thinking enables you to see good where there may be only bad, and it is tempting to try out a little magic on this mess. For example: let's postulate that the collapse of the financial-services industry spells catastrophe for New York City, a return to the nineteen-seventies. Lost tax revenues, budgetary shortfalls, unemployment (not only of those in finance but of the hordes who rely on them), plunging property values, vanished retirement accounts. Let's cut this up, like a pile of bad debt, into various strips, and, as the rating agencies did to various slices of subprime-mortgage debt, take the top layer and, abracadabra, rate it triple A. Throw out the other strips, the grim probabilities—the crime,

the decaying infrastructure, the hardship all around, the heroin and the syphilis. What do we have left? The bright side: maybe Manhattan will become affordable again, and cool, and dangerous. Dangerous in theory, but not to you or your family and friends. Dirty, but in a good way. Night clubs where anything goes. Art, music, Billy Martin.

Hit the bid.

—Nick Paumgarten

POSTSCRIPT DAVID FOSTER WALLACE

David Foster Wallace, who died on September 12th, at the age of forty-six, was in many ways a writer of his time. "Infinite Jest," a 1,079-page literary manifesto that was also a piercingly funny, inventive, and deeply moving novel about tennis, film theory, Alcoholics Anonymous, Québécois separatism, and differential calculus, made him a cause célèbre when it was published, in 1996, and spawned whole schools of fiction writers eager to emulate his dense, footnote-and-endnote-riddled, riffing, colloquial style. But Wallace was also a throwback to another time—when the romantic vision of the writer was of a recluse, living far from the capital, struggling through his manuscript in the privacy of his own study, and emerging years later with a masterpiece. He was a private person, modest and genuinely self-deprecating. (He signed his letters with smiley faces long before emoticons existed.) Of one of the manuscripts he sent to this magazine, he wrote, "I cut it heavily twice, for the basic reason that what I want here is the appearance or impression of brutality without actually being brutal or painful to read (you should have seen the last draft . . .), but it's still hard on the cortex." Wallace, a self-proclaimed Midwesterner, who grew up in central Illinois and taught for ten years at Illinois State University, liked to use words like "neat" and "goosey," and was, for years, inseparable from his bandanna, and yet—educated at Amherst and, for a time, a graduate student in philosophy at Harvard—he could also title a story "Yet Another Example of the Porousness of Certain Borders (VI)," write a technical text on the history of infinity in mathematics, and thread his take-downs of pop culture with metaphysics.

Wallace's talent was a generous one—

each book or story or piece of journalism seemed to overflow with words. He had much to say, many ways in which to say it, and many ways of commenting on what he had just said. He also had a determination and a confidence in his work that extended to every comma and conjunction. In his fiction, he aimed at capturing the authentic rhythms of speech and thought, even when doing so meant breaking the rules of writing (rules that Wallace, an obsessive reader of dictionaries and guides to grammar, was extremely familiar with). He loathed by-the-book copyediting, and on his manuscripts he sometimes added the note ^{***}N.B.: ALL NONSTANDARD SYNTAX IS INTENTIONAL. ^{***} While going over proofs of his last published story, "Good People," which appeared in this magazine in 2007, he wrote, "I have ended up taking more of your changes . . . than I thought at first I would. But in some cases I've 'taken' them in a sort of oblique way that's entailed further small changes around the recommended change—most often, this has taken the form of clarifying or declumsifying a phrase or passage you'd suggested, but then finding other, more innocuous ways to clumsify or 'voice up' that part."

Great literature, Wallace once said, made him feel "unalone—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually." He was one of the few satirists able to avoid meanness; he was moral without being judgmental. He took on the absurdities of modern life in an attempt to understand or to parse them, not to mock them. Debating the tone of the title of "Good People," he noted, "My own terror of appearing sentimental is so strong that I've decided to fight against it, some; but the terror is still there. . . . Do you identify with a distaste/fear about sentimentality? Do you agree that, past a certain line, such distaste can turn everything arch and sneering and too ironic? Or do you have your own set of abstract questions to drive yourself nuts with?" Gleefully compacted as his language could be, it was designed to be unwrapped—and there was always a gift inside for those who took the trouble. Wallace, who had moved to California in 2002, purposely stayed away from the noise of New York City publishing, but, even in his absence, he had a definite, gracious presence in the world of letters. This new absence will be far harder to bear.

—Deborah Treisman

THE FINANCIAL PAGE PUBLIC HUMILIATION

Before the government stepped in last week, the bodies of financial institutions—Lehman Brothers, Merrill Lynch, and A.I.G., with Washington Mutual and even Morgan Stanley threatening to be next—were piling up so fast it seemed possible that Wall Street might simply cease to exist. The list of blunders that led to the carnage is by now familiar: firms succumbed to the frenzy of the housing bubble; relied on dubious mathematical models to manage risk; and leveraged bad bets with suicidal amounts of borrowed money. But the impact of these mistakes was made worse by a seemingly harmless decision that these companies made many years ago: the decision to go public. Doing so put the firms at the mercy of the stock market, and last week that mercy evaporated.

Once upon a time, investment banks were private firms, structured as partnerships, and relying on the capital provided by the partners in order to run their operations. In fact, until 1970 the New York Stock Exchange prohibited investment banks from going public. But after that regulation's repeal there were two big waves of I.P.O.s, one in the nineteen-seventies and one in the eighties, at the end of which nearly every prominent Wall Street firm was public. (The last holdout was Goldman Sachs, which went public in 1999.) The incentives were obvious. Partners could cash out and other employees could more easily be compensated with stock. More important, going public allowed companies to raise huge amounts of capital, which, in turn, increased the amount of money they could borrow to leverage their bets and the profits they reaped when those bets came off. Between 1995, Lehman's first full year as a public company, and 2007, its revenues more than sextupled, while its profits grew more than seventeen times.

All, then, seemed good. But, for Wall Street firms, going public was a deal with the devil, because it meant exposing themselves to what was, in effect, a minute-by-minute referendum, in the form of the stock price, on the health of their operations. This was fine as long as

things were going well—the higher the stock price, the richer everyone got—but, once things started to go bad, that market referendum started to look like a vote of no confidence. And that made the problems that the companies were already facing much, much worse.

That's because the entire edifice of Wall Street is built on confidence. Investment banks rely on short-term debt to run their businesses, and their businesses consist of activities—trading, dealmaking, money management—that depend on people's faith in their ability to honor their obligations. As soon as the customers and creditors of a company like Lehman start to wonder whether it might collapse, they become less will-



ing to lend or to trade, and more likely to demand their money back. The perception of weakness exacerbates the reality of weakness. And although there are myriad measures of a company's health, nothing looks scarier than a stock price that's heading toward zero.

All companies, of course, worry about how their stock is doing. But for most the stock price is a product of performance, rather than a cause of it. If Procter & Gamble's stock plummeted tomorrow, people would still keep buying Tide. By contrast, if an investment bank's share price tumbles, it not only wrecks people's confidence but also can lead to credit-rating downgrades, which provoke a further decline in the stock price, and so on. The downward spiral can be stunningly fast

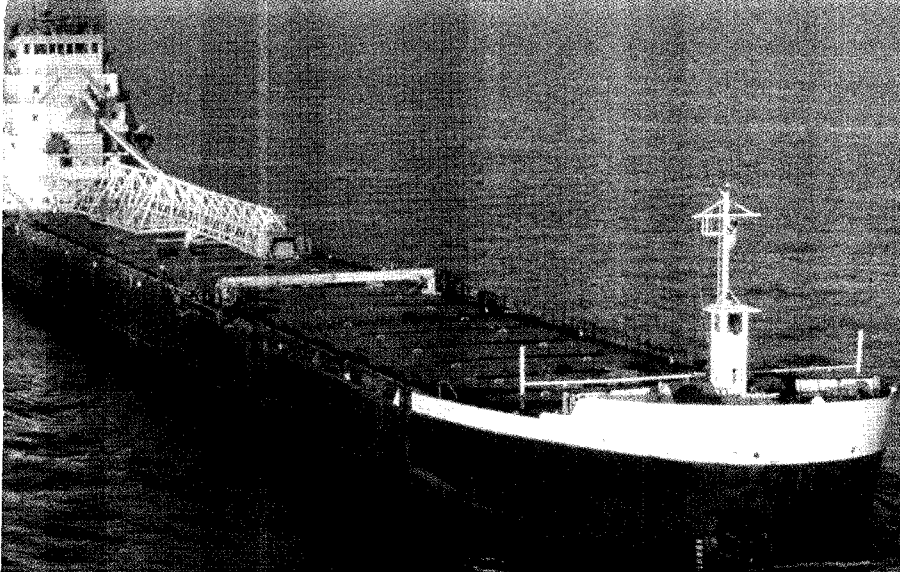
and near-impossible to escape. Lehman's assets were not significantly more toxic last Monday, when the company filed for bankruptcy protection, than they had been a week earlier. And, technically speaking, the bank may not even have run out of money, since it had access to an emergency liquidity line from the Federal Reserve. What Lehman did run out of was credibility. It couldn't remain a going concern because creditors and customers no longer trusted it. Why would they, when its stock price had fallen nearly eighty per cent in the previous week? The less faith the market had in the possibility of Lehman's survival, the more remote that possibility became.

This doesn't mean that stock prices don't reflect reality—Lehman's business really was in bad shape—or that Lehman would have survived had it been private. But being publicly traded makes it harder to take the long view and survive market storms. It's possible that a year or two from now many of the toxic assets that financial firms have written off will turn out to have considerable value. (That, one assumes, is why the private-equity firm Lone Star Funds spent almost seven billion dollars, in July, to buy such assets from Merrill Lynch, at a steep discount.) However, public companies, in order to satisfy ratings agencies and convince shareholders that they were cleaning up the mess they'd made, had little choice but to dump those assets.

Considering that Wall Street firms spend all day dealing with the market, they have been slow to understand just how vulnerable they were to it. Companies like Lehman and, earlier, Bear Stearns saw going public as an excuse to take on more risk and act more recklessly, when in fact becoming a public company makes caution more important, since the margin for error is smaller, and the punishment for failure swifter. Now that the government has acted, Wall Street (or what remains of it) may yet be able to regain investors' confidence. But long-term survival really depends on remembering the fundamental truth about playing with other people's money: it's a lot of fun until they suddenly decide to ask for it back.

—James Surowiecki

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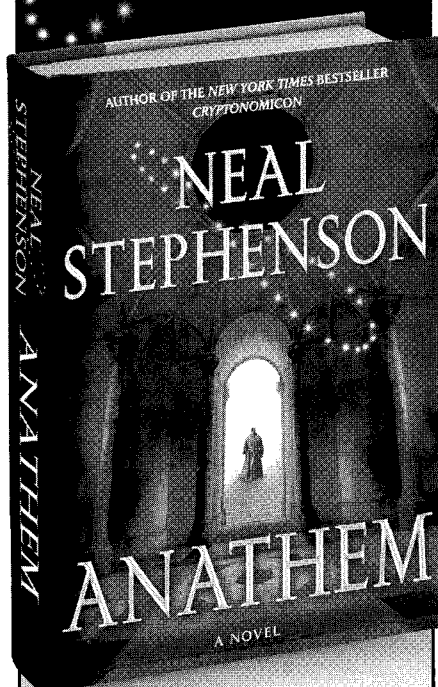
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PERSONAL HISTORY

THE MADNESS OF SPIES

A Secret Service secret.

BY JOHN LE CARRÉ

I carried my first 9-mm. automatic Browning when I was just twenty years old. I was a National Service second lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps in Austria. It was my first clandestine mission, and I was in heaven. The year, I think, was 1952, and I was stationed in Graz, the hub of the British Occupied Zone in the early Cold War years. The gun was loaded. On the advice of the Air Intelligence Officer, or A.I.O., in charge of the operation, I wore it jammed into my waistband against my left hip with the butt foremost, allowing for an easy draw across the body. Over it I wore a green loden coat, borrowed under a pretext from one of our Field Security drivers, and, for additional cover, a fetching green Tyrolean hat, bought at personal expense. Such was my disguise of choice for a top-secret night trip through sparsely populated countryside to Austria's border with Communist Czechoslovakia.

The A.I.O., however, had opted for the more traditional spy's attire: fawn raincoat and trilby hat, which, together with his military mustache, gave him, to my callow eye, a rather too British look. But he knew best. The A.I.O. was a veteran of the business, as we National Service fledglings had often been reminded sotto voce by our seasoned superiors in the bar of the Wiesler hotel, reserved for British officers, where the A.I.O. could be observed of an early evening, always seated in the same corner and half-hidden by his Austrian newspaper, with a mahogany whiskey at his side and a crisp white handkerchief jammed into the cuff of his officer-class sports jacket. The A.I.O., they said, had done his share of this and that—as ever with the clear implication that we hadn't.

As became a man of mystery, the A.I.O. was a solitary. His office, which we never entered, was situated in the attic of the elegant villa on the edge of town that our military masters in Vienna

had requisitioned for us Intelligence types. Spy ethic dictates that the higher up the building you go the more secret it gets, which explains why we mere Field Security trash were confined to the ground floor. But I knew his window. It was a dormer, thick with grimy net curtains. He had no known rank, and no known staff. He made no use of our mailroom. We assumed, but were never told, that he relied on his own communications system. Just occasionally, a standard tin box of papers would arrive for him by way of the Army Field Post Office, and although it looked exactly like the sort of junk we ourselves were handling, he would immediately hasten downstairs and, with an air of immense gravity, return with it to his aerie. He was said to be much decorated, but we never saw him in uniform. In short, he was the real McCoy. His work might look as boring as ours, but in reality he was an undercover Friend, meaning a member of M.I.6, the highest form of Intelligence life known to man.

Why me, sir? I asked him, when he suggested we take a quiet stroll along the river.

"Because you've got what it takes," he replied, in the bitten-off style of a man who would prefer not to be speaking at all.

How do you know I have, sir? I asked.

"Been watching you."

Our car was an innocent black Volkswagen Beetle with civilian plates. The A.I.O. explained that he had got it from Intelligence Organization Vienna, which, as far as I was concerned, was the summit of Olympus. Should we by chance be stopped by the Austrian police, he said, we were two businessmen from Graz interested in buying farmland for cash. This would explain the ten thousand U.S. dollars in the brown briefcase lying on the back seat of the Beetle. The dollars also came from Int. Org.

Only when all else failed, he said, should we flash our cards and declare ourselves to be British military personnel engaged on secret duties.

At first as we drove I could think only of the Browning nudging at my hip. But as the night darkened and my body eased and the Browning grew warmer, we became a pair, which was what the A.I.O. had said we would do. "Think of it as part of you," he advised. So I did, even if from time to time I discreetly fingered the safety catch to make sure it was still on.

In what sort of situation might I be using it, sir? I asked.

"Contingency. If the Czech goons come after him, we give him covering fire. Not till I tell you, mind." And, as an afterthought, "Don't go for the legs. Aim for the mark."

The mark?

"Shoulders to groin and all points between."

My thoughts turned to the brave man we had come to meet: a high-ranking officer in the Czech Air Force, risking death and worse to bring precious information to the West. At this very moment, said the A.I.O., our man was creeping over the border with the aid of sympathetic frontier guards.

How about dogs? I asked.

"Drugged."

Once across, said the A.I.O., who was a stickler for need-to-know, our man would proceed to a certain frontier village just inside Austria, and this was the village we were heading for. Its name remained secret right up to the moment when the signpost blew it.

Is he defecting, sir?

The A.I.O. looked grim and shook his head. "Man's got a wife and kids, for God's sake. It's a one-time sell."

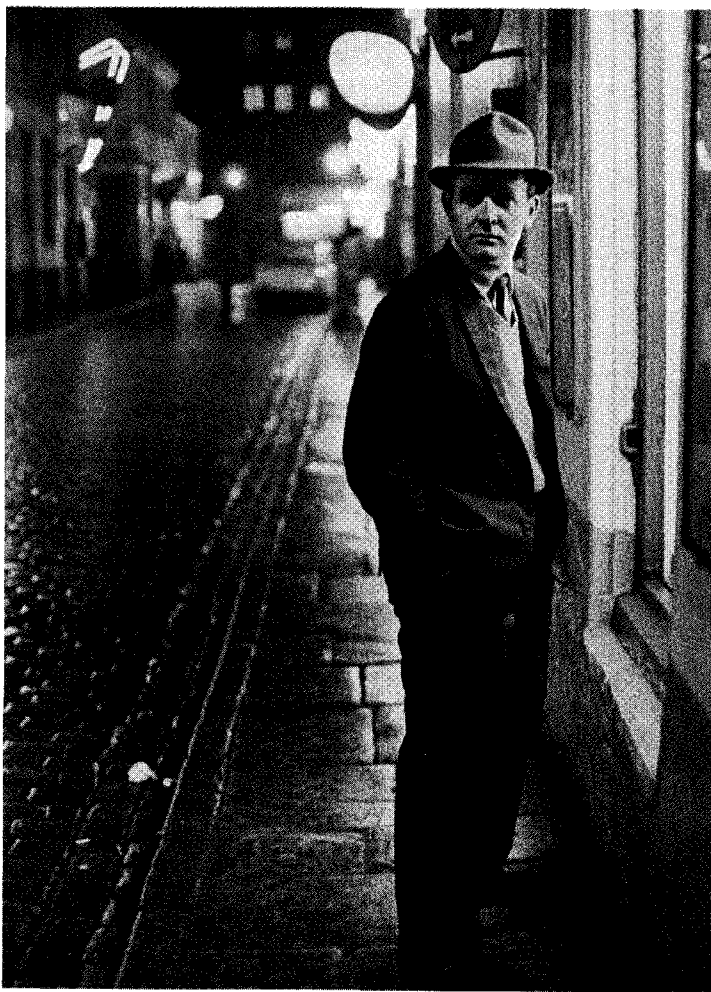
And then he'll go back?

"If he can."

And if he can't?

The A.I.O.'s silence was more eloquent than words.

A tiny inn stood at the empty roadside. Light burned yellow in the windows. The only sound was of male voices, which stopped dead as soon as we walked in. The A.I.O. went ahead in case there was trouble. I followed with the briefcase. In a single low-ceilinged room, a score of peasants in blue overalls stared at us in mute amazement



The author in Hamburg, in the early nineteen-sixties.

through the tobacco smoke. A billiards table occupied the center of the room. Nobody was playing. A vacant bench stood next to the bar. The A.I.O. sat on it. With the briefcase at my feet, I sat beside him, observed by the peasants. The A.I.O. ordered two beers in snappish, swallowed-up German. Today I wonder whether "two beers" was the only German he knew. The landlord set them in front of us, and the echo as they hit the table seemed to go on forever.

"Fancy a game of billiards?" the A.I.O. muttered, in English, out of the corner of his mouth.

Love one, I muttered back.

The gun was indeed part of me: so much so that I had ceased to notice its presence on my hip. Stooping to address the ball, I was startled by the clang of a heavy metal object striking the tiled floor, and looked around to identify the source. Finally, I saw the Browning lying at my feet, but by then the inn had emptied itself of customers and landlord. I retrieved it, returned it to my waistband, and picked up the briefcase.

"Abort," the A.I.O. ordered, pausing only to finish his beer.

His composure astonished me. Not a word of rebuke. We returned to the Volkswagen, sat in it, and waited. For whom? The Austrian police? Or our intrepid spy? The A.I.O. seemed at ease with either possibility, but neither appeared. He had a flask of Scotch and we took pulls from it. The dawn came, and somehow the purpose of our great mission evaporated. With a philosophical sigh, the A.I.O. started the engine and set course for Graz.

As with all great intelligence operations, ours had no known outcome—or none to me. Did the brave Czech airman ever make his attempt? I had no chance to ask. A couple of days later, the A.I.O. had vanished, leaving no forwarding address. Did he

give back the ten thousand dollars, or keep the money for another day? In "A Perfect Spy," I made some use of the story, but my larger purposes did not allow me to give it the status it deserved as an account of my hero's first armed exploit. On Her Majesty's Secret Service.

Nevertheless, with the ripening of years, I think I have hit upon an answer to the questions that have troubled me for so long. There was no Czech officer crossing the border that night. The briefcase did not contain ten thousand dollars; at best, there was an old pair of pajamas and a reserve bottle of Scotch. The A.I.O. was not the favored son of

Int. Org., he was not an undercover officer of M.I.6, his work was just as tedious and useless as ours. He was one of those forgotten souls whom military bureaucracies dump on distant shores and forget about for years on end.

He was, in addition—if discreetly—mad, and living in a secret bubble all his own, a condition that in the spook world, rather like a superbug in a hospital, is endemic, hard to detect, and harder still to eradicate.

I can also hazard a guess about the nature of his madness, since from time to time I have experienced similar symptoms. The A.I.O., like the rest of us, dreamed the Great Spy's Dream. He imagined himself at the Spies' Big Table, playing the world's game. Gradually, the gap between the dream and the reality became too much for him to bear, and one day he decided to fill it. He needed a believer, so I got the job. I was well cast. Years later, for a short time, I did actually become an insider in the world that the A.I.O. pretended to inhabit, but it wasn't long before I, too, was fantasizing about a real British secret service, somewhere else, that did everything right that we either did wrong or didn't do at all.

My solution was to invent a spook world better suited to my needs, just as the A.I.O. had done. It was only our methods that were a little different.

My agreeable middle-aged roommate in the British Security Service, better known as M.I.5, was, I think, afflicted by a similar strain of the disease, although the symptoms in his case were different. But that is the nature of the disease.

I am speaking of the period of the Great Paranoia Epidemic that ran from the nineteen-fifties into the seventies, when practically everyone in M.I.5 above a certain rank, up to Sir Roger Hollis, the Director General, was suspected of being a Russian spy. The virus infected swaths of Whitehall and Westminster, but it was the spies who were worst hit, and they did it to themselves, on the strident insistence of America's intelligence community.

The bacillus had begun its life in America, before sweeping eastward. First had come the Joe McCarthy era. McCarthy died in 1957, but his torch was quickly retrieved by a deranged C.I.A. inpatient of vast persuasive pow-

ers named James Jesus Angleton, who preached that the whole of the Western spook world was being controlled by superheads in the Kremlin. In human terms, Angleton's apocalyptic vision was forgivable. He had received his education in the black arts of double cross at the knee of one Kim Philby, a long-standing double agent in the service of the Kremlin and, as head of the M.I.6 station in Washington, Angleton's bosom buddy. If any spy ever needed an excuse for going off his head, it was James Jesus Angleton: fabled poker player, master of the spook universe, who woke up one morning to be told that his revered mentor, confessor, and fellow-boozier, Kim Philby, was a Russian spy.

But that doesn't excuse the C.I.A., which made a folk hero of its mad doctor, and looked on while he poisoned the family. Not only did Angleton single-handedly immobilize his own agency. He then, with his masters' blessing, performed the same service for its closest allies, to the ribald laughter of the K.G.B. Was Angleton ever invited to address the only logical conclusion to his thesis—namely, to close down the entire Western intelligence apparatus before the Russians led us over the cliff? I doubt it.

And M.I.5, assailed by the Angleton theory, rose superbly to the challenge. It was not content with spying on its own members; a cabal of middle and senior officers also found time to spy on Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, an episode in M.I.5 history that was documented in a dubious memoir put out by one of the conspirators. The author, you may remember, was Peter Wright, another poker pal of Angleton's. Strenuous efforts by the British government to suppress the book assured it a wide readership.

The atmosphere in those days in the corridors of Leconfield House, on Curzon Street, was therefore very much as I portrayed it in "Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy," and it was the atmosphere

that prevailed in the corridor that led to the little room that my colleague—I'll call him Arthur—and I shared. In my memory, it is hushed, with furtive footsteps going past. It was my first in-house appointment.

Arthur was an M.I.5 paper-pusher of the old school: a meticulous, unadventurous, nine-to-six loyalist, with no ambitions to become what he was not. He had something of the donnish librarian about him, with bubbly gray hair overflowing at the sides, rimless spectacles, and an air of huge diligence and bustle. Sometimes he would humph, sometimes tut-tut, but he was always busy and never took a lunch hour: which was one good reason that the overworked internal-security staff decided that he was a Russian spy.

The lunch hour, they concluded, was when Arthur photographed his secret files for his Russian paymaster. The only problem was, what had he done with them? Fifty and more secret and top-secret files containing thousands of pages had been marked out to him by Registry over the past two months. None, it transpired, had been returned.

Had Arthur borrowed the files, hoping to get them back into the system before anyone spotted that they were missing? The sheer hard work of clandestine document photography is daunting, even these days. How many frames can you shoot off in a single lunch hour, even with a motor drive? A file could run to a dozen volumes or more. Each could contain a couple of hundred pages. Or was he taking them out of the building? On Fridays and Mondays, a good few of M.I.5's staffers brought suitcases into work for their weekends out of London. Was Arthur smuggling out files in his weekend suitcase? And was his overburdened K.G.B. paymaster, laboring in some squalid East End flat with the blinds down, perhaps behind-hand with his photographing?

As the number of missing files grew, Arthur was hauled up to the fifth floor and invited to explain himself. His answers never varied: yes, he had worked on the missing files. Having worked on them, he had returned them to Registry. If they were missing, it was either Registry's fault or the fault of the janitors who pushed the trolleys. It was not Arthur's.



Soon his denials were rebounding on me. If Arthur wasn't a spy, then I must be. I had pinched the files from his "in" tray. Head of Personnel sent for me. How was I enjoying my first months in harness? Did I have money troubles? Was my marriage all right? How much was I drinking? He was willing to be a father to me. Like Arthur, I denied failing to return any files.

Desk officers in M.I.5 had individual steel cupboards in their rooms. If you left your room during working hours, you locked your papers in your steel cupboard and kept the key. One midmorning, two men in artisans' brown coats, the essential uniform of our internal-security team, strode into our room and demanded that Arthur hand over the key to his steel cupboard. Without lifting his head, he put a hand in the pocket of his librarian's shiny gray jacket, passed them the key, and resumed his work. Shelf after shelf of his steel cupboard was stuffed with missing files. But Arthur paid no attention, either to the files or to

the men in brown coats who stood staring at them with their mouths open. He remained bowed over the file on his desk, studiously turning the pages.

Arthur and I were "vetters," Arthur the old hand, myself the trainee. Our job was to comb through the records of people who were in line to acquire access to secret information and make a first call about whether they should be allowed to have it, be investigated, or be shifted to less sensitive employment. Like the A.I.O., Arthur was a loner, with no home life that I knew of. Little by little, all the same, I persuaded him to share the odd Friday-evening pint with me in a nearby pub in Shepherd Market. And it was on one such evening that Arthur told me a disturbing story. A month before I joined his section, he had been dispatched to New York on a liaison visit to the F.B.I. And in New York, according to Arthur, the F.B.I. had shaken him out. Not once but every day, systematically. He

likened the ordeal to sustained psychological torture, and he wasn't sure that he had survived it unscathed.

Each evening when he returned to his Manhattan hotel after a day's liaison, he discovered that he had been moved to a different floor. Nobody in the hotel acknowledged this, he said. When he asked at the desk—politely—for his room key, the concierge would laugh and shake his head and tell him he'd got the number wrong, but here was the right key anyway, sir. So, instead of being on the fifth floor, where he'd slept the previous night, he found himself on the eighth, or the eighteenth, or the twenty-eighth, always the same size room, he said, and always the same space, the same curtains, cupboards, and bedspreads. But always a different floor. Night after night after night.

And there were no outward signs, Arthur insisted, peering into his tankard. The floor had changed, but the room hadn't. Each time around, his suits, shirts, socks, and underpants were laid out precisely as he had laid them out in the pre-

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vious room. In the bathroom, it was the same story: razor, shaving brush, toothpaste, you name it. He was a methodical man, he said. Known for it. The smallest deviation would have caught his eye, and there wasn't one. Only the F.B.I. could have pulled off a job like that.

I asked Arthur whether he had fathomed the F.B.I.'s motive for taking all this trouble, and he said that he had given the question a great deal of consideration. His conclusion was that the Bureau was putting him under strain, then waiting to see how he responded and whom he got in touch with.

"They were trying to flush me out," he explained to his tankard.

Why would they want to do that? I asked.

Because of the vetting cases he'd handled, he said: file-holders who'd been small-time Communist sympathizers in their student days, but Arthur had given them the benefit of the doubt. He wondered in retrospect whether he might have crossed the line. Gone with them, even.

What line? I asked. Gone with them where?

"Clearing chaps I shouldn't have cleared," he said. "If I was soft on ex-Coms, perhaps I was a Com myself, and not necessarily ex." Then he added, "And, for all I know, they're right."

Are you telling me you could be a Communist sympathizer without even knowing it?

"Other chaps are," said Arthur. "If other chaps are, why shouldn't I be?"

In the nineteen-fifties, it took a lot to advise a friend to put his problems to a shrink, all the more so if he was twice your age and you were a probationer sharing an office with him five days a week. And there was a standing order that, if a staff member felt the need to unburden himself to a shrink, he had first to get the name of a shrink the Service approved of: which in effect meant telling M.I.5's Head of Personnel that you had a mental problem. I hoped Arthur's delusions would pass, but they didn't. Where the A.I.O., in the monotony of his neglected existence, had recast himself as a knight of derring-do, Arthur had recast himself as a victim of his own witch hunt. In a world that was almost as paranoid as ours is now, the security-risk assessor had become a se-

curity risk to himself. And, having decided this, he took the only logical step available to him: he ceased to put his name to anything anymore. He locked everything away where even the F.B.I. couldn't see it. Then he was safe.

The superbug of espionage madness is not confined to individual cases. It flourishes in its collective form. It is a homegrown product of the industry as a whole. Is a cure at hand? I doubt it. The most down-to-earth citizens from the real world, appointed to oversee the spooks' activities, turn to clay in their hands. Faith in spies is mystical, fuelled by fantasy and halfway to religion. They're a protected species in our national psychology. Our banks and financial services may collapse, our economy may be going through the floor, our road and rail system may be a catastrophe, our Millennium Dome a laughing-stock, the cost of fuel, energy, and water rising by the week, but our spies are immune to all of it. Never mind how many times they trip over their cloaks and leave their daggers on the train to Tonbridge, the spies can do no wrong.

It's the men who are mostly to blame. Were wise women present when the notorious and acutely embarrassing Iraq Dossier, justifying Britain's involvement in the Iraq war—and better known as the Dodgy Dossier—was composed? If they were, they were outgunned by the men of madness; who didn't merely plagiarize a five-month-old article dredged from an obscure academic journal; they seriously believed, in their hubris and ignorance of the real world, that they could get away with it. It is slender comfort, but entirely in keeping with the code of reward and punishment dear to our present government, that the dossier's principal architect should have been promoted to Chief of our Secret Service.

All of which is a tough thing to convey in fiction, or it was for me. I tried it long ago in "The Looking Glass War," and my readers hated me for it. I tried it again in "The Tailor of Panama," this time as comedy, and I was more or less forgiven. The trouble is that the reader, like the general public to which he belongs, and in spite of all the evidence telling him that he shouldn't, wants to believe in his spies: which, come to think of it, is how we went to war in Iraq. ♦

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TOO BIG TO FAIL

BY ANDY BOROWITZ

Before you throw this letter into the proverbial round file, let's be clear: this is the first time I have ever asked for a bailout from the Federal Reserve. I know what you're thinking. Why do I deserve your largesse, and I do mean largesse, since I'm asking for five million big ones? The answer is simple. Like many of our nation's financial institutions, I am simply too big to fail. If investors were allowed to witness the collapse of Freddie, Fannie, and then Andy, I can't begin to describe what havoc it would wreak on their already frayed nerves. Actually, I can describe it: global financial calamity. I think we can both agree that, to dodge this bullet, ten million dollars is a small price to pay. (I know that I originally asked for five, but since I started writing this letter my financial situation has deteriorated in grave and unexpected ways.)

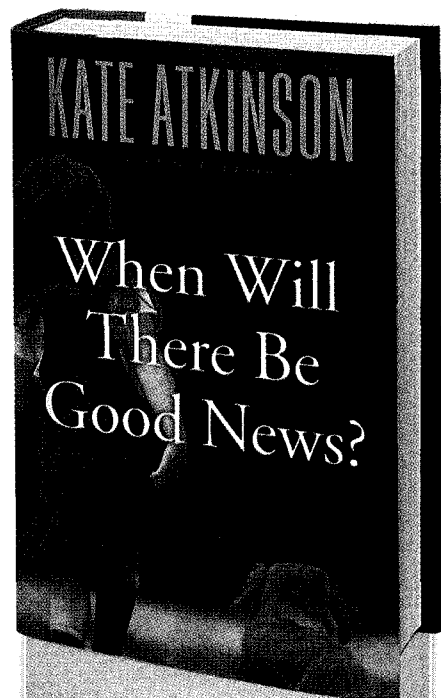
Why am I too big to fail? It's important to grasp the critical role that I play in a wide-ranging but fragile web of economic relationships. If I go belly-up, I will no longer be able to tip my doorman when he gets me a taxi. This is not a hypothetical situation. I have studiously avoided tipping him for a solid month now. Consequently, he no longer has cash to spend at the liquor store after work, and the liquor-store owner no longer has money to spend on Internet porn. Given that Internet porn is the only fundamentally sound engine of the American economy, we're playing with fire here. If that stalwart industry is allowed to fail, Asian porn companies will rush to fill the void, offering porn that is both cheaper to produce and way hotter than ours. What will it take to keep this from happening? There are no guarantees, but sending me a check for twenty million dollars would buy us all valuable time.

How did I find myself in this hole? Like most financial crises, mine had its origins on a slippery slope. First of all, I made the mistake of logging on to iTunes when I was high and downloading every Electric Light Orchestra song ever re-

corded. Second, I created my own e-commerce site, the ill-fated DressYourBadger.com. I mistakenly believed that a Web site for people who kept badgers as pets and wanted cute outfits to dress them up in would work as a subscription-based service, especially if I charged subscribers a thousand dollars a month. When there were no takers, I switched to an all-advertising model, not realizing that I was plunging headlong into the jaws of an epically weak advertising market, particularly for products relating to pet badgers.

I have never borrowed money from anyone before, and, if you don't believe me, ask any of my friends. Only don't ask Bo. You should not ask Bo for two reasons. First, Bo is under the impression that I did borrow money from him, when all I actually did was let him pay for a pitcher of Stella when it was my turn to pay, and then ran out of the bar before he figured it out. The other reason you should not ask Bo is that Bo is a ginormous dick. In fact, if Bo writes to you looking for a bailout, i.e., he wants to be made whole for that pitcher of Stella, please feed his letter to the nearest high-speed shredder. I promise you, no investor on the planet will give a rat's ass if Bo goes under.

By now, I'm fairly confident you've already decided to give me that bailout, but, just in case you haven't, here's one more good reason: there's a better than fifty-fifty chance that at some point in the next ten years I'll be elected Vice-President of the United States. I wouldn't have guessed that a few months ago, but apparently now they're letting anybody run. How is this significant for you? In addition to presiding over the Senate and attending state funerals, one of the Vice-President's duties (as I see it) is to badmouth the Chairman of the Federal Reserve to the President. This is a situation that could get, shall we say, rather awkward for you. But why even contemplate such a scenario when it could all be avoided by sending me a check? It'll be the best billion dollars you ever spent. ♦



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RICH BITCH

The legal battle over trust funds for pets.

BY JEFFREY TOOBIN

The life of Leona Helmsley presents an object lesson in the truism that money does not buy happiness. Born in 1920, she overcame a hardscrabble youth in Brooklyn to become a successful condominium broker in Manhattan, eventually alighting, in the nineteen-sixties, at a firm owned by Harry B. Helmsley, one of the city's biggest real-estate developers. The two married in 1972, and Leona became the public face of their empire, the self-styled "queen" of the Helmsley chain of hotels. In a series of ads that ran in the *Times Magazine* and elsewhere, Helmsley's visage became a symbol of the celebration of wealth in the nineteen-eighties. She wouldn't settle for skimpy towels, the ads proclaimed—"Why should you?"

In private, as it turned out, the grinning monarch wasn't just demanding but despotic. Throughout her life, Leona left a trail of ruin—embittered relatives, fired employees, and, fatefully, unpaid taxes. Knowing that the Helmsleys had used company funds to renovate their sprawling mansion, Dunnellen Hall, in Greenwich, Connecticut, disgruntled associates leaked the records to the *Post*. Among the charges billed to the company were a million-dollar dance floor installed above a swimming pool; a forty-five-thousand-dollar silver clock; and a two-hundred-and-ten-thousand-dollar mahogany card table. In 1988, the U.S. Attorney's office charged the couple with income-tax evasion, among other crimes. (Harry Helmsley avoided trial because of ill health; he died in 1997, at the age of eighty-seven.) At the trial, a housekeeper famously testified that Leona had told her, "We don't pay taxes. Only the little people pay taxes,"

and the public warmed itself on a tabloid bonfire built under the Queen of Mean. Leona was convicted of multiple counts and served eighteen months in federal prison. In time, following her release, she became largely a recluse, and she died at Dunnellen Hall on August 20, 2007.

After her husband died, Leona Helmsley got a dog named Trouble, a



Leona Helmsley's will left millions to her dog, Trouble.

Maltese bitch. In her will, which she signed two years before her death, Helmsley put aside twelve million dollars in a trust to care for Trouble. Further, she directed that, when Trouble died, the dog was to be "buried next to my remains in the Helmsley Mausoleum," at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, in Westchester County. Helmsley made only a handful

of relatively small individual bequests in the will, and left the bulk of her remaining estate to the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. Based on the figures in court files, that trust may turn out to be worth nearly eight billion dollars, which would make it one of the top ten or so foundations in the United States. (Leona's estate was so large because Harry left his fortune to her.) According to a "mission statement," which Helmsley signed on March 1, 2004, the trust was to make expenditures for "purposes related to the provision of care for dogs." The size of the bequests, to Trouble and to dogs generally, has generated widespread astonishment.

In fact, the clear motivation underlying Leona Helmsley's will—her desire

to pass her wealth on to dogs—is more common than might be expected. Pet-lovers (many of whom now prefer the term "animal companion") have engineered a quiet revolution in the law to allow, in effect, non-humans to inherit and spend money. It is becoming routine for dogs to receive cash and real estate in the form of trusts, and there is already at least one major foundation devoted to helping dogs. A network of lawyers and animal activists has orchestrated these changes, largely without opposition, in order to whittle down the legal distinctions between human beings and animals. They are already making plans for the Helmsleys' billions.

For a couple that became emblematic of late-twentieth-century New York, Harry and Leona Helmsley were an unlikely pair. Harry, born in 1909 and raised in the Bronx, was sixteen when he joined a small Manhattan real-estate firm as an office boy for twelve dollars a week, and soon worked his way into a partnership. In 1938, he married the former Eve Green, a widow. Tall, stooped, a workaholic before the term was invented, Helmsley started buying buildings that were, in a way, a reflection of himself—drab but profitable. Often collaborating with a rotating group of partners on

different projects, he moved on to a few more glamorous acquisitions, like the Empire State Building, in 1961, but he seemed to go out of his way to avoid calling attention to himself. He and Eve had no children. "My properties are my children," he would say.

Lena Rosenthal, in contrast, was a raucous, disputatious presence seemingly from birth. (She later changed her name to Leona Roberts.) Nearly every aspect of her biography has been challenged, particularly if she was the source for it. She claimed to have worked as a model for Chesterfield cigarettes in her early years, but evidence for that assertion is elusive. She was married three times, but generally acknowledged having had only two husbands. She married Leo Panzirer in 1940, and they divorced twelve years later. Then she married and divorced Joseph Lubin (she usually neglected to mention him at all in later years), before her marriage to Harry Helmsley, who had left his wife of thirty-three years shortly after Leona's arrival at his firm. Leona had one child, Jay Panzirer, who died, of a heart ailment, in 1982, at the age of forty. Jay Panzirer had four children, and these grandchildren survived Leona. The will hints at the tense relationship between her and her only descendants.

Leona had contentious relationships with almost everybody (except Harry). In particular, she came to despise Jay's widow, Mimi, his third wife, for reasons that Mimi later said she never understood. Following Jay's death, the Helmsleys moved immediately to evict Mimi and their eldest grandchild, Craig, from their home in Florida, which was owned by a Helmsley subsidiary. During the next several years, the Helmsleys filed no fewer than six lawsuits against Mimi, asserting that they were entitled to the money in Jay's estate, a distinctly modest sum compared with their own fortune. After five years of rancorous litigation, Leona won about two-thirds of the two hundred and thirty-one thousand dollars at issue. As a result of Leona's legal triumph, each of her grandchildren was left with an inheritance from their father of a little more than four hundred dollars.

In her will, Leona Helmsley was more generous to two of her grandchildren, David and Walter Panzirer, who were left trusts and bequests worth ten million dollars, on the condition that

they visit their father's grave at least once a year. (Jay was buried in the family mausoleum, alongside Harry and Leona.) To make sure that they did, the will stipulated that the trustees "shall have placed in the Helmsley Mausoleum a register to be signed by each visitor." Leona's other two grandchildren, Craig Panzirer and Meegan Panzirer Wesolko, were excluded from any inheritance, "for reasons which are known to them." (The reasons were not disclosed.) That omission led to the first legal skirmish regarding the Helmsley estate. Lawyers for the two disinherited grandchildren filed a notice in Manhattan Surrogate's Court announcing that they planned to challenge the will on the ground that Leona "was not of sound mind or memory and did not have the mental capacity to make a Will" in 2005.

Leona's executors—her surviving brother, Alvin Rosenthal; her grandsons David and Walter Panzirer; her lawyer Sandor Frankel; and John Codey, a family friend—decided to settle the dispute quickly. They agreed to amend the will so that Craig and Meegan also received bequests: four million dollars for Craig, and two million for Meegan. In return, Craig and Meegan agreed to an elaborate confidentiality provision, promising not to "directly or indirectly publish or cause to be published any diary, memoir, letter, story, photograph, interview, article, essay, account or depiction of any kind" concerning the dispute over the will. Likewise, they agreed that all of their "personal correspondence . . . records, tapes, papers and financial information of or relating to" Leona must be given to the estate's lawyers. (Consequently, neither Craig nor Meegan, nor their attorneys, would comment on the dispute.) Still, the conflict among the human beneficiaries of the will was easy to resolve compared with the legal matters relating to dogs.

The modern history of legal rights for animals begins with a chimpanzee named Washoe. "He was the first 'signing chimp,' the first chimpanzee who learned sign language to communicate with people," Victoria Bjorklund, the head of the exempt-organizations practice at the New York law firm of Simpson Thacher & Bartlett, said. "There came a time when he was going to be sent off to be used in medical testing,

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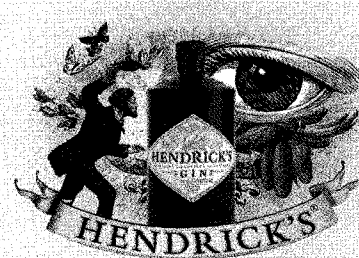
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and there was a lot of distress about that possibility." So Bjorklund and others set up a trust (funded with the proceeds of a book about Washoe), and appointed a guardian to protect him and several other chimps like him. The problem was that New York law said that a guardian could be appointed for a "person with a disability." Was Washoe a "person" under New York law?

The lawyers at Simpson Thacher argued that "the mental, emotional, sociological, and biological characteristics" of Washoe and the other chimps "warrant their treatment as persons" entitled to representation. The lawyers submitted affidavits from such animal experts as Jane Goodall, who said that "chimpanzees are biochemically closer to humans than they are to any other of the great apes." According to the brief in the case, the chimps "are capable of rational thought, communication, and other higher cognitive functions," justifying their treatment as the legal equivalent of minors or disabled humans. In a 1997 decision, the surrogate of Nassau County agreed and appointed a guardian to administer the trust for the benefit of the chimps. "That trust was then respected by the State of Washington, where Washoe lived," Bjorklund said. "We think it was the first trust ever established for the benefit of specific nonhuman primates."

Jane Hoffman, a former associate at Simpson Thacher, had brought the Washoe case to the firm. "The idea was to create a right for a nonhuman animal to receive money—to push the envelope on the law, which at that point had only allowed trusts for the benefit of children or disabled adults," she said. In 1990, Hoffman and a group of other lawyers founded a new committee at the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, on "Legal Issues Pertaining to Animals." One of the first subjects that the committee's members took up was the issue of inheritance. In 1996, they helped change the law to make it easier for any animal—especially a pet—to become the beneficiary of a trust. Many people wanted to make provisions for the care of their pets in their wills, but the law allowed no simple mechanism to do so. Frances Carlisle, a New York trusts-and-estates lawyer and a member of the committee, pushed the New York State Legislature to allow the creation of

"pet trusts," which permit individuals to put aside money and instructions for their pets. New York approved the changes, and now thirty-eight states allow for the creation of such trusts. "We decided we didn't want people to have to leave the disposition of their pets to chance, or a sudden decision, after they died," Carlisle told me. "We want to give people peace of mind about their animals."

The legal movement, which largely focussed on pets, was, of course, symbiotically aligned with the broader animal-rights movement, which also grew in the nineteen-nineties. But the theme remained the same—to extend the rights of humans to animals. In a country where most people eat meat, many hunt, and most others give little thought to the legal rights of their pets, the complexities of such a change are considerable. Even pro-animal-rights scholars, like Peter Singer, a professor at Princeton, recognize the difficulties. As Singer said at a recent conference in New York City, "We're talking about beings as different as chimpanzees, pigs, chickens, fish, oysters, and others, and you must recognize those differences." For the moment, the goals of the movement are modest, and largely limited to domestic animals.

"What the law is doing is catching up with the idea that people don't consider their pets property, in the way a car or a chair is," Hoffman told me. "I am not pumping for my cats to be able to vote for McCain or Obama. I'm not saying they could visit me at the hospital, though that's probably a pretty good idea. The right category for pets is closer to children, who can't vote, and can't own property, but you can't inflict pain on them, either. The law is catching up with societal beliefs."

Leona had never had a dog before she got Trouble," Elaine Silverstein, a co-founder of the Miami agency that created the "queen" advertisements for the Helmsley hotels, told me. "She

treated her like a person, and took her everywhere. She would take that dog to bed with her every night." After Helmsley's release from prison, she returned for a time to her hotels' ads, but for one campaign she insisted that Silverstein feature Trouble instead. The ad showed the tiny white dog perched on a red velvet chair, and text that said, "Trouble," the Helmsley's favorite four-legged guest," recommends that you call for reservations. "It didn't make much sense for a dog to endorse a hotel, but that's what Leona wanted," Silverstein said.

Still, Helmsley's relationship with dogs reflected some of the distemper of her dealings with humans. According to Silverstein, one of Helmsley's friends, seeing how much she loved Trouble, gave her another Maltese, who was named Double Trouble. "But Leona never liked that dog, so she got rid of it," Silverstein said. "That was usually Leona's solution. It was what she did with people."

For all Helmsley's love of Trouble, her will certainly made life complicated for the dog. She stipulated that Trouble, when her time came, join Leona, Harry, and Jay in the family mausoleum. (Leona also established a three-million-dollar trust for the "perpetual care and maintenance" of the mausoleum, directing that it be "acid washed or steam cleaned at least once a year.") According to Carlisle, however, a joint human-canine burial is not possible at Sleepy Hollow. "Under New York law, animals can't be buried in human cemeteries," she said. "Leona could possibly be buried in a pet cemetery with Trouble, but not the other way around. That was an error in the drafting of the will." (Trouble is still alive, so it's not clear where she will be buried.)

The twelve-million-dollar trust for Trouble also created problems. The will stated that custody of Trouble should go to Rosenthal, Leona's brother, or to her grandson David, and the trust agreement directed them to "provide for the care, welfare and comfort of Trouble at the highest standard." But neither man wanted the dog. After the will was made public, Trouble received death threats, which may have had something to do with their refusal. (Both men declined to comment.) So the trustees had to find the dog a home. Moreover, the bequest



to Trouble was so self-evidently excessive for a single, aging dog that the trustees decided to take steps to reduce it.

As a guardian for Trouble, the trustees settled on Carl Lekic, who is the general manager of the Helmsley Sandcastle Hotel, in Sarasota, Florida. According to his affidavit in the case, Lekic had known Trouble since she was born, because Leona spent several months a year, late in life, at the hotel. "When I visited New York on business while Mrs. Helmsley was alive, I would also see Trouble and would pay attention to and play with her," Lekic said. The trustees agreed to pay him five thousand dollars a month to take care of Trouble. Lekic estimated annual security costs for the dog of a hundred thousand dollars, grooming costs of eight thousand dollars, food costs of twelve hundred dollars, and veterinary care of up to eighteen thousand dollars.

But how many years would Trouble likely live? To answer this question, the trustees sought an affidavit from Dr. E. F. Thomas, Jr., Trouble's veterinarian. Trouble was nine years old in early 2008 and had, according to Thomas, "several ongoing medical problems," including hypothyroidism and compromised kidney function. In the light of her medical issues, and the patterns of Maltese generally, Thomas estimated that Trouble was likely to live only three to five more years. In all, then, Lekic and the trustees concluded, only two million dollars of the trust's principal would suffice to cover all of Trouble's needs. On April 30, 2008, Judge Renee Roth, the New York surrogate who is supervising the Helmsley will, approved the reduction of ten million dollars in the trust. (If there is any leftover money in Trouble's trust following her demise, it goes to the Helmsley charitable trust.)

The local tabloids responded to Roth's ruling with feigned sympathy for Trouble's loss of ten million dollars. But some in the legal world of pet trusts saw the surrogate's decision as a substantial victory for their cause. "One of the greatest moments in my life was when the judge awarded two million in the Helmsley case," said Rachel Hirschfeld, a New York trusts-and-estates lawyer and the operator of *petriarch.com*, a Web site for pet owners. "It's not the reduction that's important; it's that the judge said two

SORRY YANKS VOW TO REVAMP IN '09



million was appropriate. It's a landmark case, for a judge to be able to say that we have a case for that amount of money."

The amount of money for Trouble, while substantial, pales compared with the sums at issue in the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. According to the estimate submitted in court by the trustees, the proceeds are between three and eight billion dollars. In the final years of her life, Leona appears to have given considerable thought to the trust, and to have reordered her priorities in a dog-focussed way.

To make her intentions clear for the trust, she signed two mission statements, which have not previously been made public. (The documents are available at *newyorker.com*.) On September 16, 2003, Leona signed a document that listed three goals for the planned expenditures. The

money was to go first "to the provision of care for dogs." The second was more conventional: "the provision of medical and health care services for indigent people, with emphasis on providing care to children." A third category covered "such other charitable activities as the Trustee shall determine." About six months later, however, Helmsley changed her mind. On March 1, 2004, she signed a new mission statement that revoked the previous one, and made one significant change. She now omitted the second purpose—medical care for the indigent, especially children—and left only the purpose of caring for dogs and the catch-all third category.

What this means for how the trust will operate is far from clear. "A mission statement is really just guidance to the trustees," Victoria Bjorklund, of Simpson Thacher, said. "It's not binding on them. It would only be binding if it was in the

will itself." Still, the mission statement should have an influence on how the trustees allocate the funds. "The fact that she took out the care of children means to me that she probably experienced a change in her priorities that she expressed that way," Bjorklund went on. "And there is a general-purposes clause that says the trustees can use the funds for anything that would be charitable. So they don't have to use the money only for the care of dogs, but she is certainly indicating that it's a priority." The trust is not yet operating or making grants, and people familiar with the work of the trustees say that they are still trying to figure out what to do.

The animal-rights movement in New York is, however, already gathering proposals for how to use the money. The most detailed ideas so far come from Jane Hoffman. In 2002, the former corporate lawyer founded the group now known as the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals, a not-for-profit organization that works as a public-private partnership with more than a hundred and forty animal-rescue groups and shelters around the city. "We are committed to making New York 'no-kill,' one community at a time," she told me, using the movement's term for eliminating euthanasia as a means of population control for any kind of animal.

To run the operations of the alliance, Hoffman secured a \$25.4-million grant over seven years from Maddie's Fund, the largest-endowed dog-and-cat-centered foundation in America, which was created in 1999 by the founder of PeopleSoft software, Dave Duffield, and his wife, Cheryl. The Duffields have endowed the foundation with more than three hundred mil-

lion dollars and made grants of more than seventy-one million dollars. According to the fund's Web site, "The Foundation makes good on a promise the Duffields made to their beloved Miniature Schnauzer, Maddie, to give back to her kind in dollars that which Maddie gave to them in companionship and love."

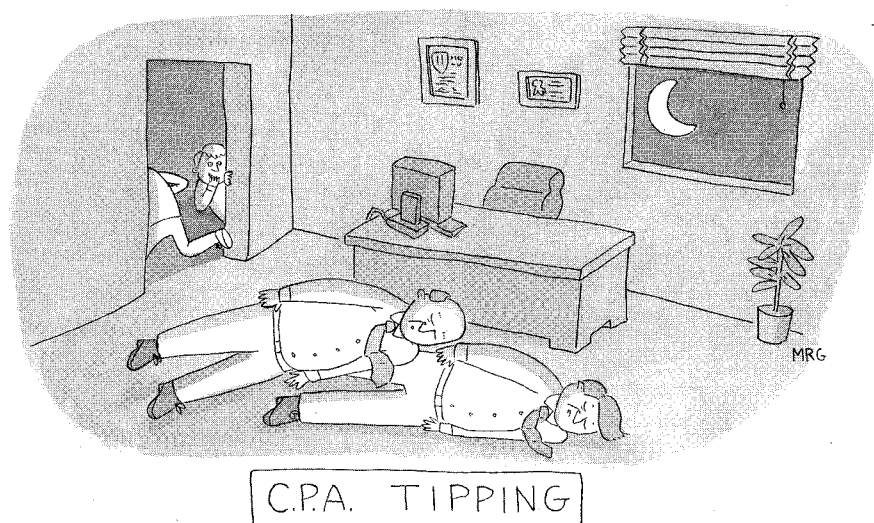
Hoffman and other animal-rights supporters have been nursing a grudge for years against the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. Duke, the tobacco heiress, died in 1993 and left much of her wealth to a foundation that now has assets of about two billion dollars. In her will, Duke spoke of her interest in the "prevention of cruelty to children or to animals" and in "promoting anti-vivisectionism." (Duke's pets included two camels and a leopard, as well as several dogs.) The Duke foundation has a program to combat child abuse, but it has never invested in an animal-welfare program. Claire Baralt, a communications officer for the foundation, points out that the will says that support of animal rights was optional, not mandatory. According to Hoffman, however, "Doris Duke is a good example of how a testator's intent has been thwarted. You know that person was extremely attached to her animals, but, at the end of the day, the trustees have made sure that very little has gone from that estate to animals. If you judge animal need against human need, human need is going to win most of the time, because we are human. We want to make sure the same mistakes are not made with Helmsley."

"The thing that I'm trying to get people to realize is this is not bling for dogs," Hoffman went on. "When you think

about it, five to eight billion dollars isn't that much. Foundations are required to give out at least five per cent of their assets every year, so we're talking about two hundred and fifty million to four hundred million dollars." This vast sum, which would dwarf the proceeds of Maddie's Fund, could finance a great deal of medical research on or about dogs, but most of the ideas so far involve establishing no-kill policies for strays. Thanks in part to the efforts of the members of Hoffman's alliance to foster adoptions and spaying and neutering, the percentage of animals killed in New York City shelters has dropped from seventy-four per cent, in 2002, to forty-three per cent, in 2007. Hoffman would like to use the Helmsley money to buy more spay-neuter vans, at two hundred thousand dollars each, and windowed vans for adoption events, at a hundred and seventy thousand dollars apiece; and to establish a "special Leona Helmsley Memorial Veterinary Hospital for needy pets," at twenty million dollars a year, "providing medical treatment, inoculations, and training to help low-income families care for their dogs and create safer and more humane communities." Hoffman wants to take these ideas nationwide. "A Leona Helmsley Trust dedicated to helping make the U.S. 'no kill' could actually achieve its goal in a remarkably short amount of time," she said.

Hoffman's enthusiasm obscures the fundamental moral question about how Helmsley hoped to dispose of her fortune. The way Leona altered her mission statement places the issue in especially stark terms. Version one proposed helping dogs and ailing poor children; version two—the final version—cut out the children and gave everything to the dogs. Is there any justification for such a calculation? Or does Helmsley's change, along with the broader vogue for pet bequests, reflect a decadent moment in our history?

"In the nineteenth century, when the robber barons started modern American philanthropy, there were no tax deductions, no incentives from the government to give, just the growing idea that with wealth comes social and moral obligation," Vartan Gregorian, the president of the Carnegie Corporation and a veteran of the New York philanthropic scene, said. "They could spend their money any



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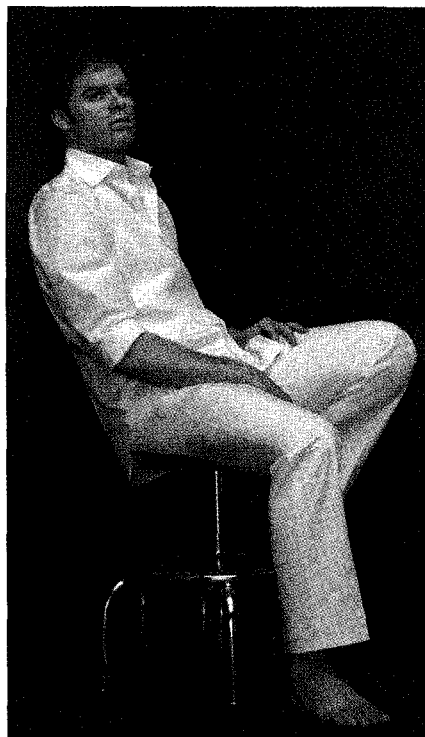
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THE THINKING MAN'S SERIAL KILLER PROFILING DEXTER MORGAN

By Showtime Networks

Okay, so he kills people. We all have our little secrets. Cut Dexter Morgan some slack, though—once you get past the whole murder thing, he's a really likable guy. You don't get to be America's favorite serial killer without considerable charm, not to mention something most of his fellow serials lack: standards. You see, he's a serial killer who kills other serial killers. He has found a way to feed his dark impulses while making the streets safer for the rest of us. It doesn't exactly make him a "good" guy, but he certainly has a refreshing take on taking life.

When We Were Innocent

Dexter Morgan—Dex, to people who think he's their friend—was born Dexter Moser, younger son of a struggling Sunbelt family, back in the time when you still needed an antenna to watch TV. Things went from not-great to terrible when his mother, Laura, became a police informant and irritated some very bad people. Three-year-old Dexter witnessed her untimely end. (Chain-saw, three-inch-deep pool of blood.)

Enter Harry Morgan, the veteran officer who recruited Laura as a snitch. He took in the young Dexter, but the boy's trauma had awakened a dark, savage side. Harry, determined to teach his damaged foster son to survive, embraced what he saw as an irreversible descent into darkness.

"You can control it, channel it...use it for good," he said. "I'm going to show you how to choose when and who you kill."

Which more or less explains how Dexter ended up working for the Miami Metro Police Department as a blood-spatter expert, helping the cops catch killers while moonlighting as one himself. A blood-traumatized boy now an expert at decoding the splash and gore of murder scenes, a killer compelled to do "good" in order to remain at large, Dexter is well-equipped to appreciate life's ironies—even if he is, as he likes to remind us, entirely unable to feel normal human emotions.

Profile of a Serious Killer

Of all his accomplishments, Dexter Morgan's greatest creation is undoubtedly...Dexter Morgan. He's certainly got a way with murder, but his most endearing talent lies in faking life, not taking it. He's a superb actor. The normal life he has constructed so carefully around himself—the lab job, the sensible car, the nice girlfriend, the normal apartment—all of it is, or at least began as, a ruse. "Harry's Code" tells him that the more bad stuff he wants to get away with, the harder he has to try to seem normal. And so he bides his time. Studying us. Learning our constantly evolving rules of etiquette. Marveling at our contradictions, the impulses we try so amateurishly to hide. ("Normal people are so violent," he deadpans.) He has become, in his way, better at being human than we are, and therein lies his charm. Dexter tries harder than the rest of us, because for him, courtesy and social niceties are literally matters of life and death.

It's strange how few people can tell the difference. Cops are easy—make them look good by closing cases, bring doughnuts most mornings, and the term "serial killer" will never enter their minds, because bad guys simply don't do such things. Romance is much more dangerous. Dexter began seeing Rita only because not having a girlfriend at his age would raise eyebrows, but she absolutely dotes on him, worrying that he's "been working killer hours."

"Everything is falling into place for the first time in my life," she says. "Got these terrific kids, there's no more drama haunting me and...I've got this great, generous, gentle guy."

"She assumes we've taken it to the next level," says Dexter. "She doesn't know yet, I don't have a next level."

Experts on the minds of psychopaths explain that it's difficult to treat or even identify these individuals, because you are not dealing with a complete man. Instead, the individual is a carefully constructed machine that mimics a healthy human personality.

This devilishly tricky quality makes the psychopath almost preternaturally charming—like Dexter. Not that Dexter would describe himself as a soulless killing machine who just happens to like mambo and Cuban sandwiches. He sticks with less clinical, more straightforward language. “I’m a very neat monster,” he says simply, tidily packing the remains of Mike Donovan—husband, father, choir director, pederast, child murderer—into a few tall kitchen bags. “Whatever made me the way I am left me hollow, empty inside,” he says. “People fake a lot of human interactions, but I fake it all, and I fake it very well—and that’s my plight.”

It's the Thought That Counts

But does even Dexter believe that anymore? There has been a lot of blood under the bridge since his confident beginning, and he has, on several occasions, had experiences that can only be described as feelings—protective feelings for Rita and her kids, Cody and Astor. Was it pity that caused him to let the blind Vodou killer off with a warning? (“Let that be a lesson to you!”) Or did Dexter just momentarily lose his mojo?

What’s more, he “feels” something even stronger for Deb, his “marvelous, foul-mouthed sister.” Debra’s a young woman desperately seeking her dead father’s approval. Her cop’s bravado, her monomaniacal quest to follow in Harry’s footsteps as a legend on the force, her scabrous mouth—capable of bringing a blush to the most veteran cheek—it’s all part of a futile attempt to gain the attention of a man who in life was far too busy teaching his son

to be homicidal in a good way to ever notice. Now Dexter is all she has.

And what of Harry? More than Dexter’s father, he was his creator, the architect of the life Dexter now—with all of whatever he uses for a heart—wants to make his own. Dexter’s need to come to terms with his foster father is powerful and real...and human, surely. Or can we be so sure?

Is it Dexter’s quest to stop living according to the tenets of Harry’s Code and become a real boy (if really naughty), or is self-discovery just another bit of theater from the “subtly constructed reflex machine”? “If you play a role long enough, really commit,” Dexter asks, “does it ever become real?” And, more importantly, can he afford at this point to become emotionally involved in his own act? As he says, an inability to feel has its advantages. Detachment gives him his killer charm, his keen sense of irony, his immaculate manners. It makes him the poetically appealing monster, who unhesitatingly (most of the time) kills other monsters. It lets him slip with a wry shrug through the cracks of everyday prejudices, playing us ordinary people by offering us something we already want or need to believe. He offers a twisted kind of heroism, and his personal life is a fascinating maze of family secrets and bloodshed worthy of Attic drama. Now he seems to be on a quest to risk it all and discover his humanity. Could it be just another ruse? Or, if he’s sincere this time, would we even want him to succeed?

He’s got something in that box of doughnuts for us all.

Story continues Sundays at 9 PM ET/PT on SHOWTIME.

CONTRIBUTORS

Dexter Morgan

A handsome, charming blood-spatter expert with killer instincts.

Debra Morgan

Dexter’s foster sister knows him better than anyone, but that’s not saying much.

Rita Bennet

Dexter’s girlfriend is perfect for him—she’s got more issues than most weekly magazines.

Lt. LaGuerta

It’s lonely being in charge. If only her personal life were as simple as running Miami Homicide.

Vince Masuka

Resident CSI chick magnet who is always looking for evidence...of beautiful women.

Angel Batista

He’s got a big heart and an ex-wife, and isn’t much good at letting go.

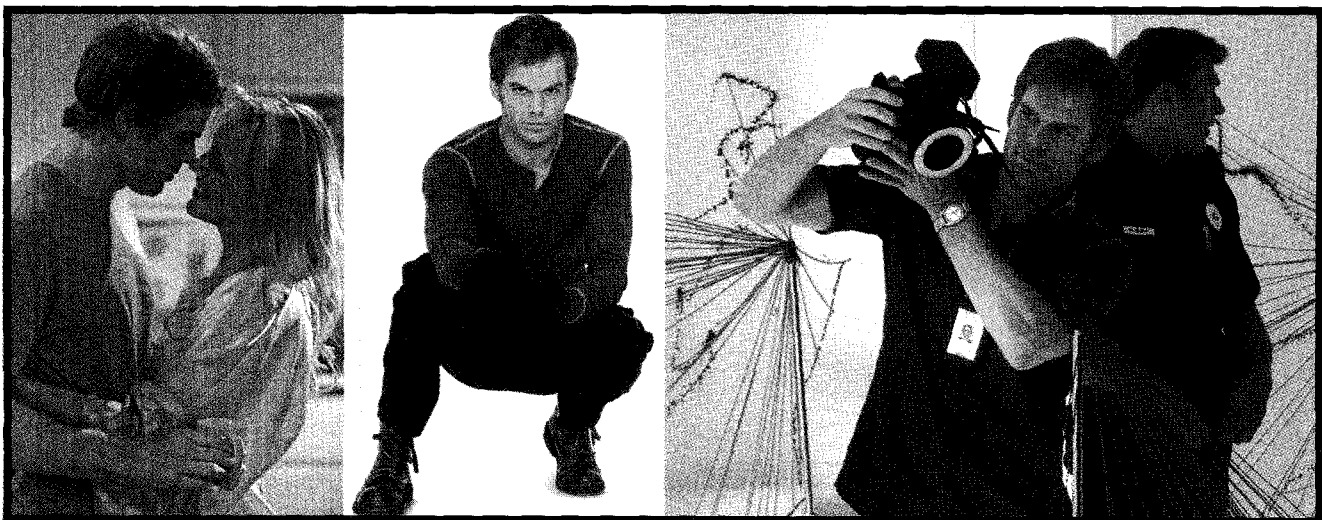
Harry Morgan

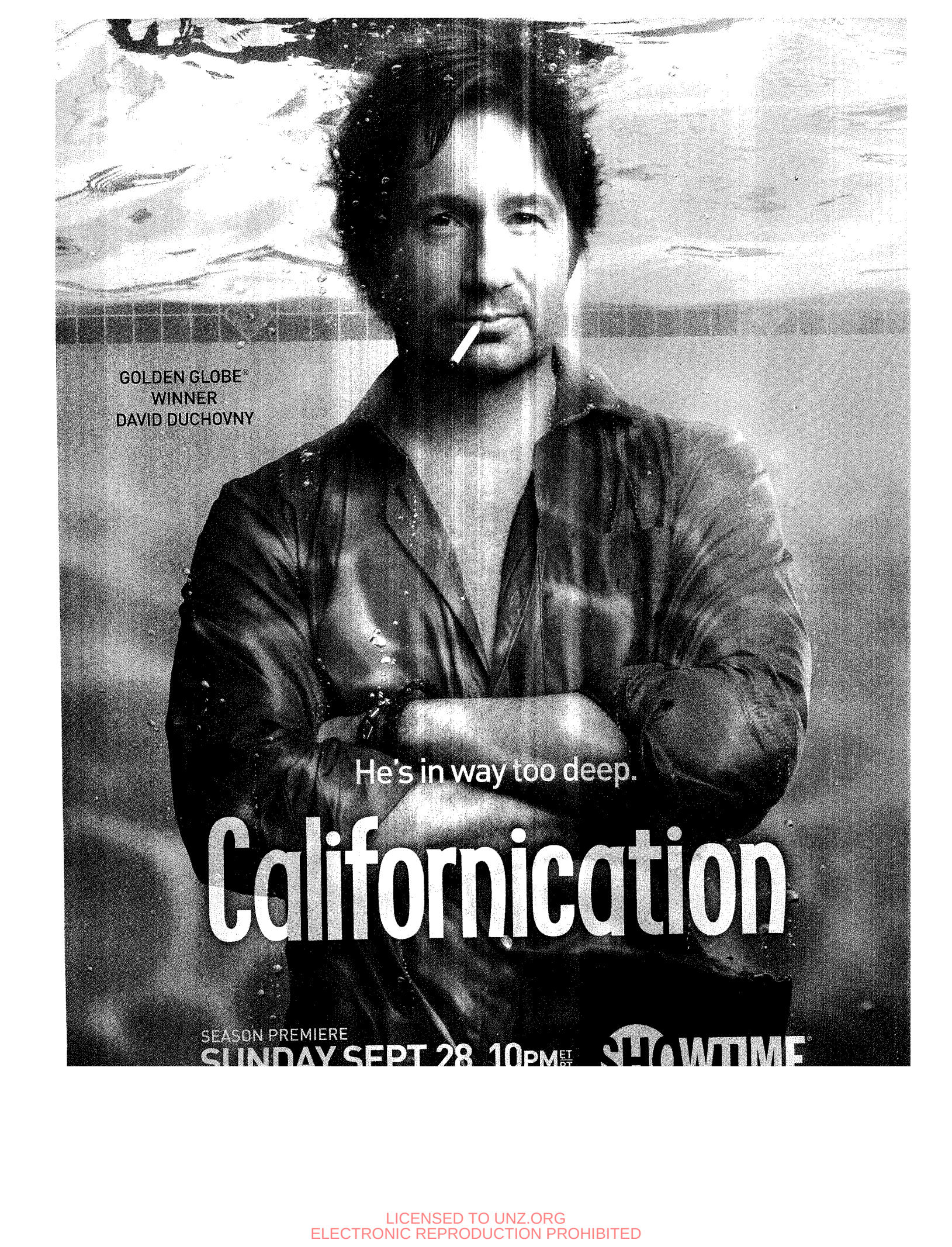
Dexter’s foster father taught him to channel his dark urges into a morbid hobby.

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Miguel Prado, ADA

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way they wanted, but, once we started giving tax deductions, which amounted to a publicly approved subsidy, you had to prove that the money was going for a philanthropic purpose, but that is so broad that you can give to almost anything.

"When you see a gift like Leona's, it's individualism carried to iconography," Gregorian went on. "The whole idea that individuals can do whatever they want is part of the American psyche. It's left to individual decision-making. That you can give to this sector of society, which is animals, as opposed to the other sector, which is human beings, tells you something about her and about the times in which we live."

The specific nature of Leona's gift appears consistent with the pervasive misanthropy of her life and her will. This was a woman, after all, who at her trial was quoted as saying about a contractor who was owed thirteen thousand dollars for installing a custom-made barbecue pit at the Helmsley estate and wanted to be paid because he had six children, "Why doesn't he keep his pants on? He wouldn't have so many problems." (In his opening statement at the trial, her defense attorney said, "I don't believe Mrs. Helmsley is charged in the indictment with being a tough bitch.") In the light of her vast wealth, the bequests to her relatives were grudging, small, and controlling, particularly the insistence that two of Jay Panziner's children visit his grave each year. As in life, Leona's disdain for others contrasted with her nearly fetishistic obsession with her husband. (While Harry was alive, she held an annual ball to celebrate his birthday, known as the "I'm Just Wild About Harry" party.) The transfer of this kind of obsessive affection from Harry to Trouble seems apparent. The twelve-million-dollar trust for the dog is bigger than any other single bequest in the will. On the whole, the will reflects contempt for humanity as much as love of dogs.

Under the law, certainly, it was Helmsley's right to divvy up her money any way she wanted. And she is not the first wealthy person to use a will to show a preference for dogs over humans. Rumors abound about major bequests to pets, although facts are difficult to pin down. Natalie Schafer, the actress who played Lovey, the millionaire's wife, on "Gilligan's Island," is said to have left her estate for the care of her dog. ("It is still getting

residuals," Rachel Hirschfeld said.) Toby Rimes, a New York dog, is said to have inherited about eighty million dollars, and Kalu, a pet chimpanzee in Australia, may have received a bequest of a hundred and nine million dollars. (A widely reported story that a German dog named Gunther IV inherited more than a hundred million dollars appears to be a hoax.)

Is it right to give so much money to a dog—or to dogs generally? And what is the limit of such dispensations to pets? Will there come a time when dogs can sue for a new guardian—or to avoid being put to sleep? One philosopher draws a distinction between the needs of Trouble and those of dogs as a whole. Helmsley "did a disservice to the people in the dog world and to dogs generally by leaving such an enormous amount of money for her own dog," Jeff McMahan, who teaches philosophy at Rutgers University, said. "To give even two million dollars to a single little dog is like setting the money on fire in front of a group of poor people. To bestow that amount of money is contemptuous of the poor, and that may be one reason she did it."

"But to give such a large sum of money to dogs generally is not frivolous," McMahan went on. "I think it shows some misplaced priorities, but many bequests do. In a world where there is starvation and poverty, you can say that it's wrong to give money to universities, or museums, or, worst of all, to divide it up for your children and heirs who are already rich. Welfare for dogs is better than more pampering of the rich. It may indicate misplaced moral priorities, but it's not frivolous or silly. It's disgraced by the context, but the two bequests should be separately evaluated."

Throughout her life, Leona Helmsley demonstrated not just a lack of affection for her fellow-humans but an absence of understanding as well. The irony is that, for all that her will purports to show her love for Trouble, Leona didn't seem to understand dogs very well, either. "What is funny about giving all this money to one dog is that it doesn't deal with the fact that the dog is going to be sad that Leona died," Elizabeth Harman, who teaches philosophy at Princeton, said. "What would make this dog happy is for a loving family to take it in. The dog doesn't want the money. The money will just make everyone who deals with the dog strange." ♦

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Seaman Jeremiah Lineberry, just after lowering the flag aboard the U.S.S. San Antonio, as he prepares for his first deployment.

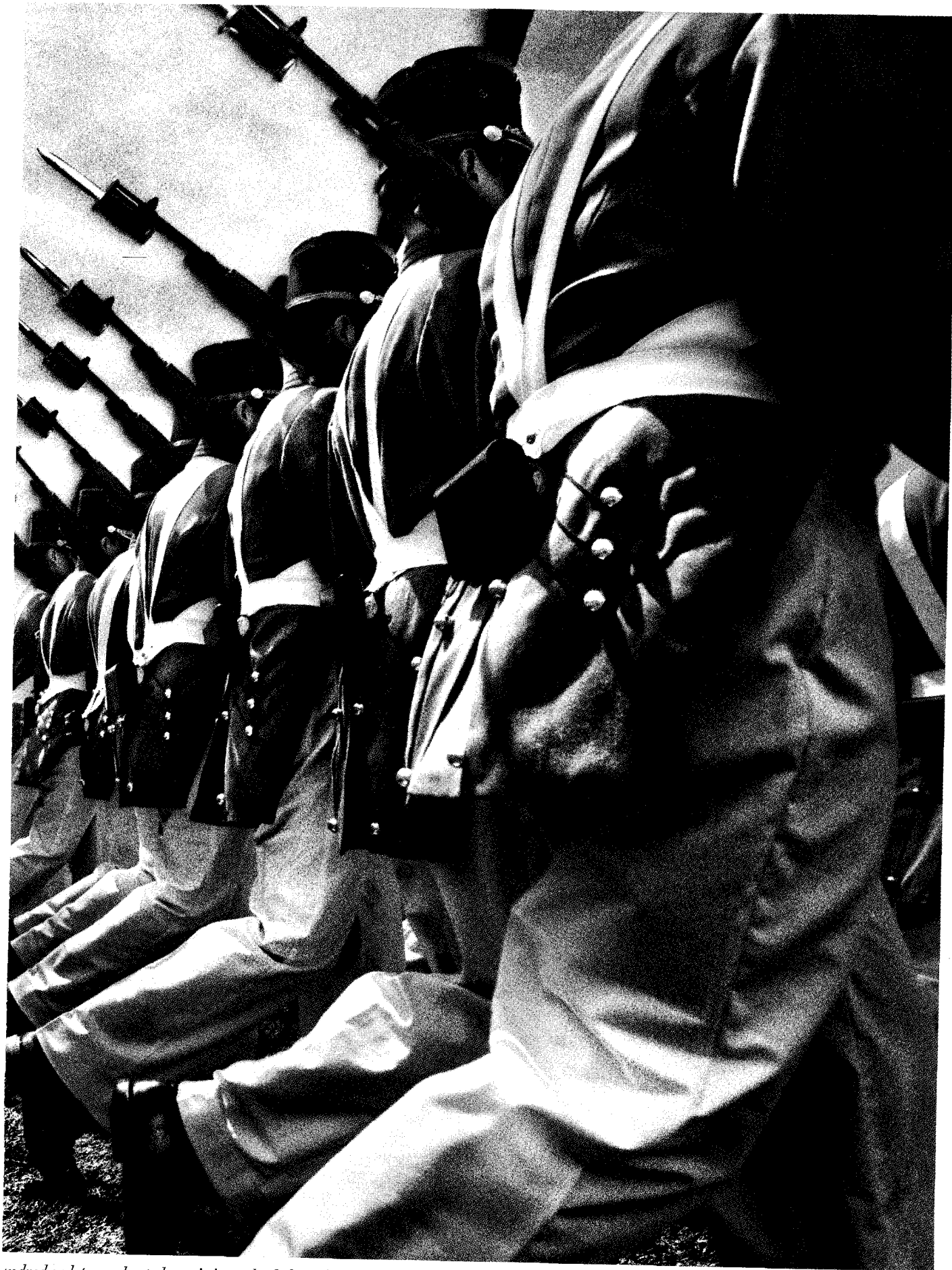
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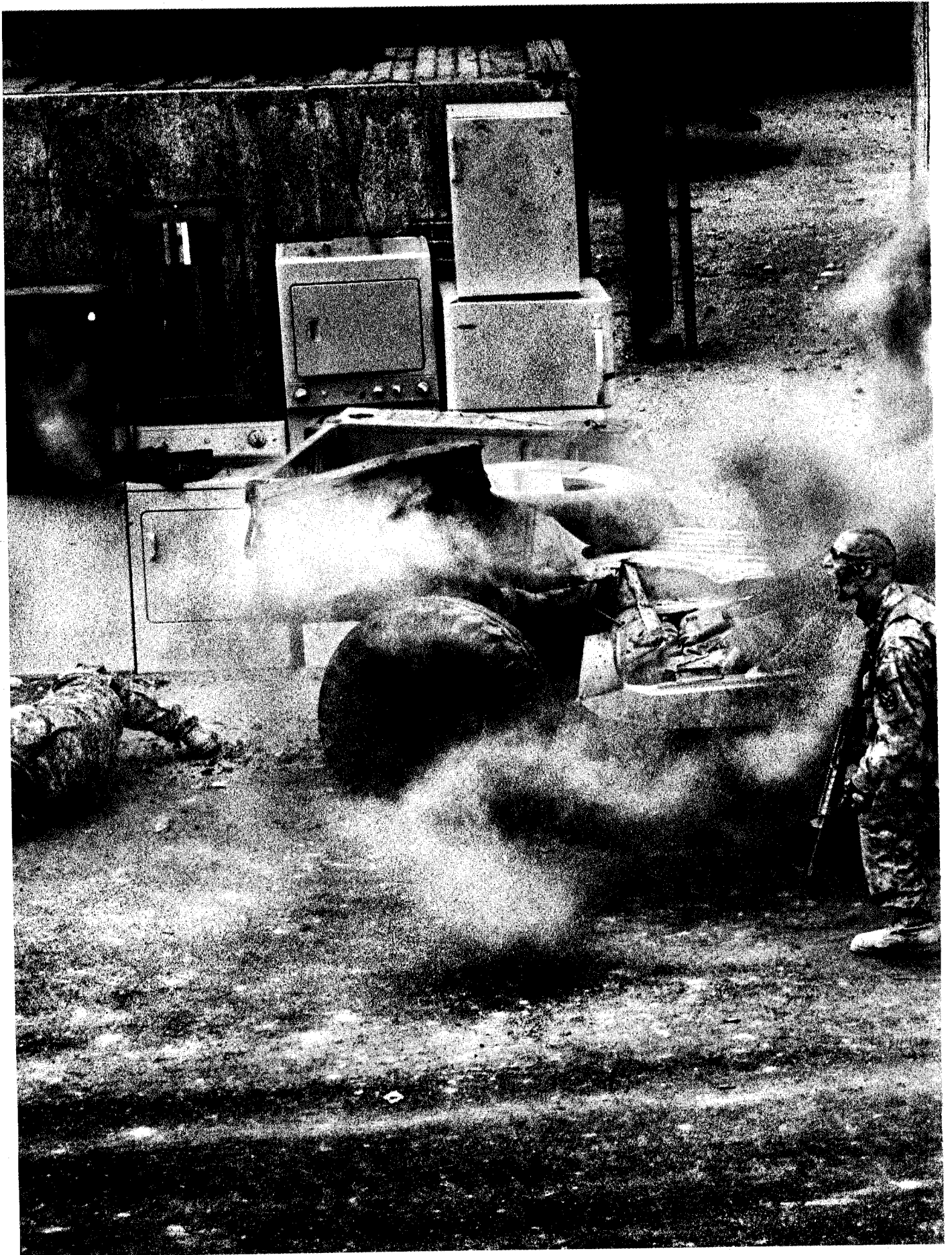
This summer, the photographer Platon took pictures of hundreds of men and women who volunteered to serve in the military and were sent to Iraq or Afghanistan. He followed them on their journey through training and deployment, after demobilization and in hospitals, to compile a portrait of the dedication of the armed services today. Sergeant Tim Johannsen, who lost both legs when he drove over an I.E.D. on his second tour of duty in Iraq, made a point of buying an Army T-shirt to wear in his photograph. Of his sacrifice, he said, "It's just part of the job. You know what you signed up for." Sergeant Matthis Chiroux, a military reporter who has become a vocal opponent of the Iraq war, says that he and others like him "take our activism as a continuation of our oath of service." Like many who enlist, Johannsen and Chiroux come from military families. Sergeant John McKay, a marine whose uncle and grandfather were marines, and whose three-year-old son posed in uniform at the wedding of a cousin, also a marine, said, "He's just waiting till he's eighteen." He went on, "I'm scared for him, but if he wants to do it I'll support him."



Cadets marching in the graduation parade at the United States Military Academy at West Point, May 30, 2008. This year, more than nine



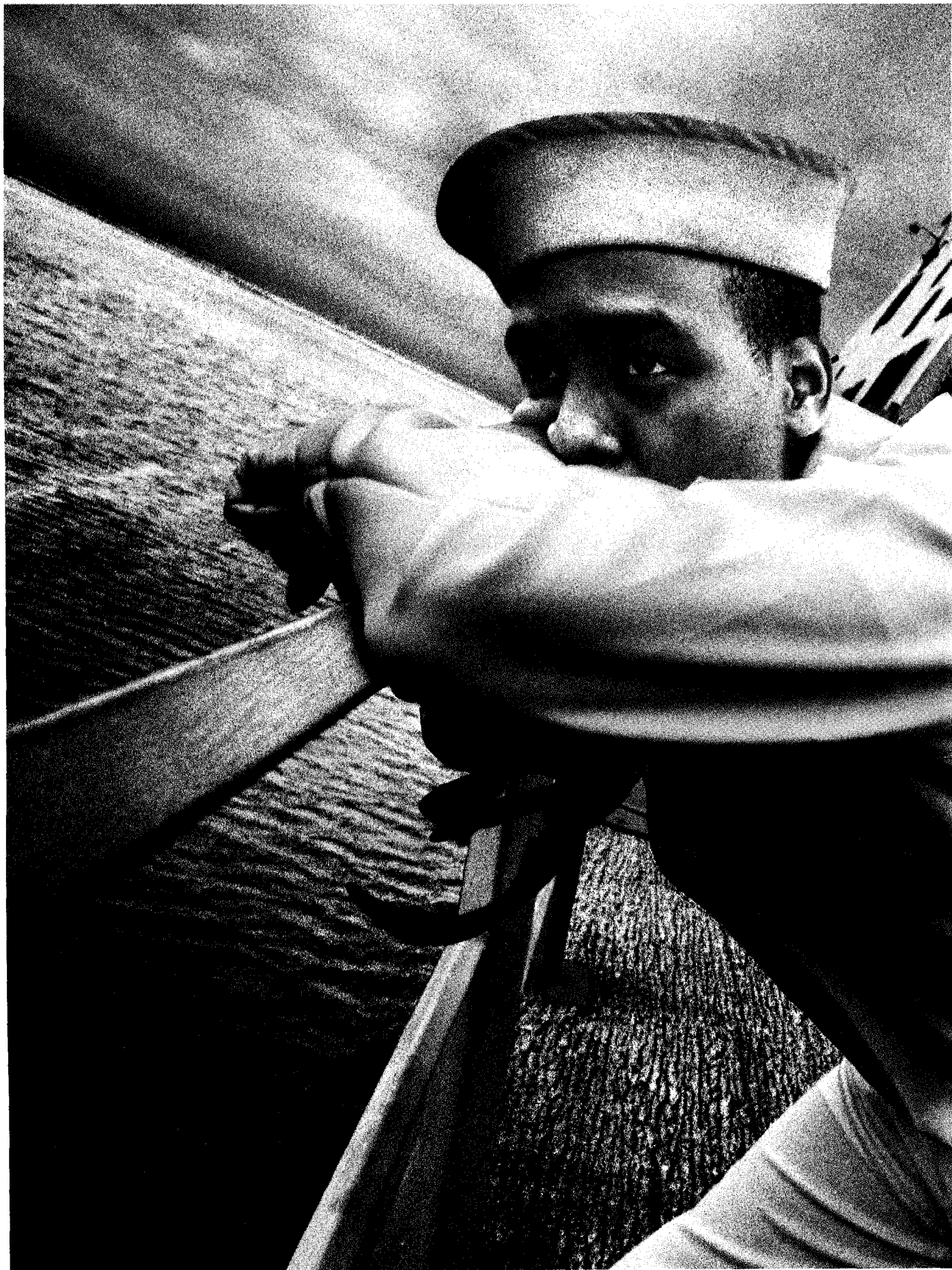
hundred cadets graduated, receiving a bachelor-of-science degree and a commission in the Army that obliges them to serve for five years.



Medina Wasl is a mock Iraqi village at the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, in the Mojave Desert, in California. These soldiers



Members of the First Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division, are performing an exercise known as Medical Trauma Lane.



Seaman Kevin Dean stands on the deck of the U.S.S. San Antonio, which set sail on its maiden deployment on August 28, 2008. The ship



ie of a number of new amphibious transport docks, is spending about six months in the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf.



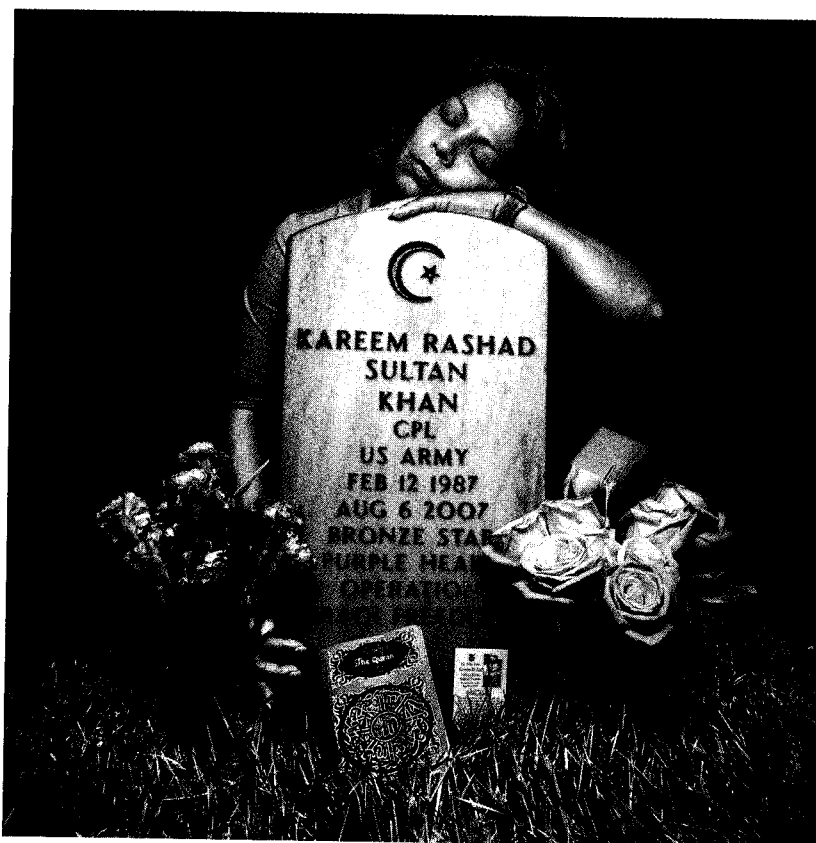
Sergeant Tim Johannsen and his wife, Jacquelyne Kay, in a rehabilitation unit at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.



Sergeant Mattis Chiroux, honorably discharged in 2007 after five years of service, refused to be redeployed to Iraq.

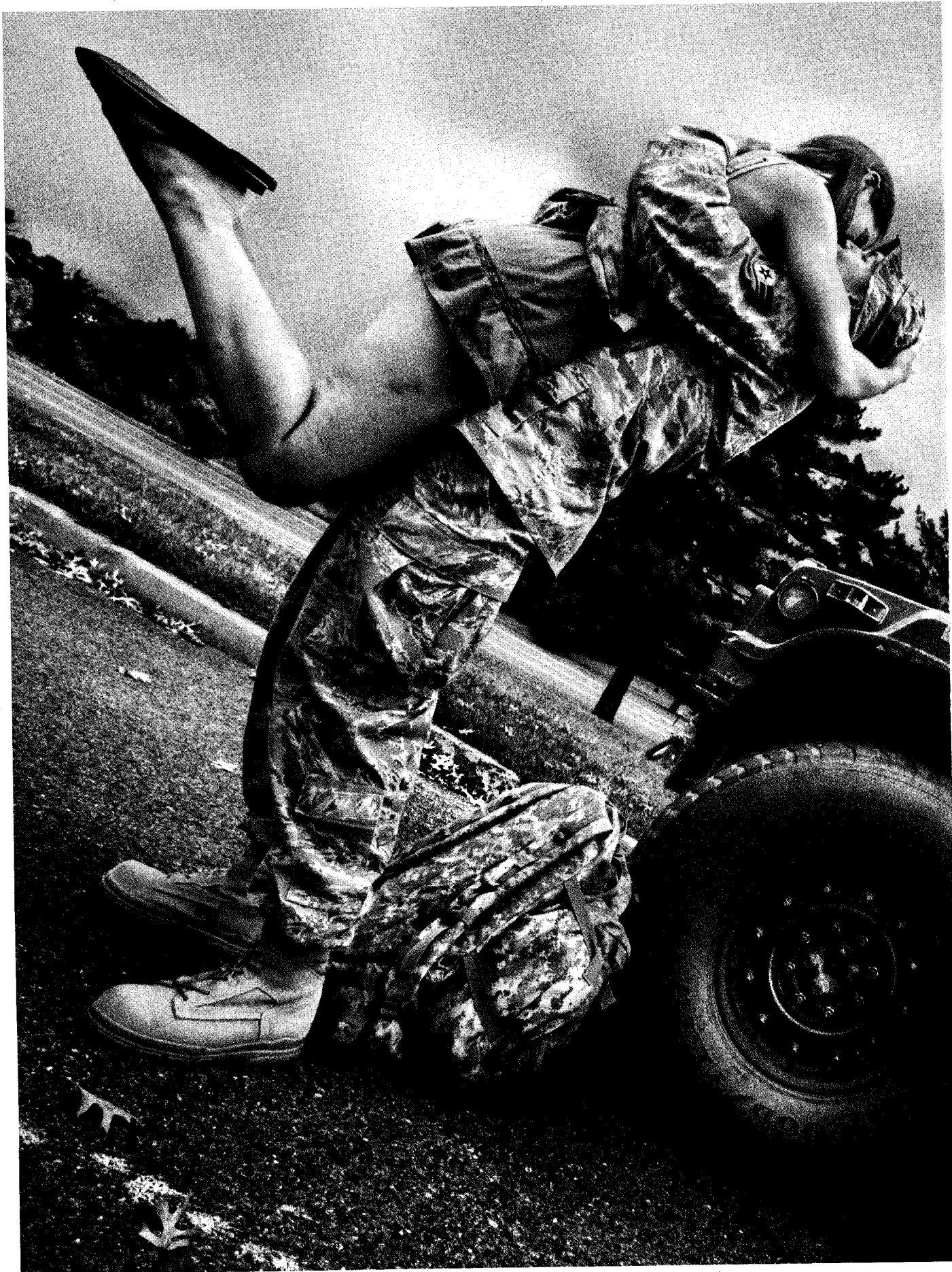


Juan Casiano at the grave of his fiancée, Captain Maria Ines Ortiz, in Section 60 of Arlington National Cemetery, where those killed in Iraq are buried.

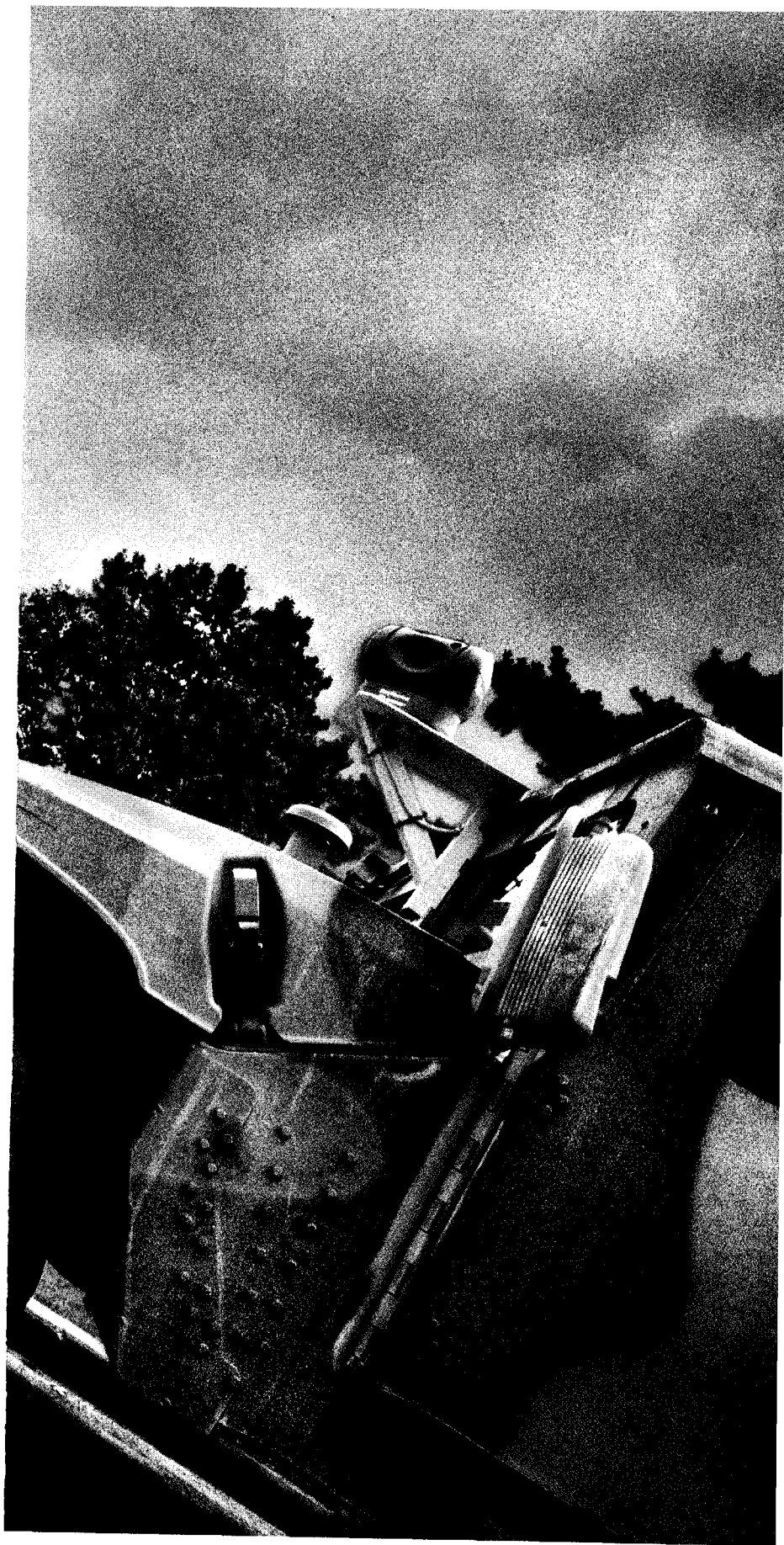


Elsheba Khan at the grave of her son, Specialist Kareem Rashad Sultan Khan.

and Afghanistan are buried.



Airman First Class Christopher Wilson greets his fiancée, Beth Pisarsky, after returning from a six-month deployment in Iraq. Wilson is



he 305th Security Forces Squadron of the 305th Air Mobility Wing, which is based at McGi



Jakob McKay, three, is the son of Sergeant John McKay, who is now home after four tours of duty in Iraq.



Jessica Gray, whose husband, Staff Sergeant Yance Gray, was killed in Baghdad last year while serving with the 82nd Airborne.

THE LAST TOUR

A decorated marine's war within.

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

When the Twiggs brothers got to the Grand Canyon, on May 12th, Willard called his girlfriend, a married woman in Louisiana, on Travis's cell phone. She had to see the canyon someday, he said. "It will make the hair on your arms stand up. It's that beautiful." A few minutes later, driving east along the South Rim past a spot called Twin Overlooks, Travis made a hard left and drove his car, a Toyota Corolla with Virginia plates, straight toward the edge of the canyon. There is no guardrail at Twin Overlooks, and the canyon at that point is nearly five thousand feet deep. The Corolla jumped the curb, but it did not take the plunge. It got hung up in a small fir tree, clinging to the Kaibab limestone just below the rim.

"I don't think there was much field research done," Ken Phillips, a National Park Service ranger, told me. He showed me a spot two miles west of Twin Overlooks where a man and a woman had driven into the gorge successfully. There was a longer straightaway for gaining speed, and a clearer path to the big drop. Double suicides are rare, and it isn't always possible to tell if both parties were willing participants. In the case of the couple, Phillips said, witnesses got a good look at their faces as they swerved, and said that both looked determined. It turned out that they were on the run from serious criminal charges.

Travis and Willard Twiggs were not in trouble with the law. Willard, thirty-eight, was a former maritime-logistics specialist in New Orleans. He had been working construction, intermittently, since Hurricane Katrina. Travis, thirty-six, was a Marine Corps staff sergeant stationed in Quantico, Virginia. He was a decorated combat veteran with one tour of duty in Afghanistan and four tours in Iraq. In January, 2008, he had created a minor stir by writing, in the *Marine Corps Gazette*, an article about his struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. Publicly acknowledging emotional problems has

never been a smart career move in the military, particularly in the Marine Corps. But Twiggs, who was known for his grit and his charm, gave his piece, titled "PTSD: The War Within," an upbeat ending, emphasizing his recovery, and he soon found himself working with a new unit, the Wounded Warrior Regiment, spreading the word about the treatment and prevention of P.T.S.D. In late April, in that capacity, he met President Bush at the White House. Rather than simply shake the President's hand, Twiggs bear-hugged him, proclaiming, "Sir, I've served over there many times—and I would serve for you anytime."

Three weeks later, he tried to drive into the Grand Canyon. Witnesses said that the brothers behaved oddly after the crash. They tried to reverse the Toyota out of the tree branches where it was wedged but could gain no traction. They did not want anyone to call for help. One seemed interested only in finding his cigarettes. They put on backpacks, said they were going to continue with their plans, and set off on foot before park rangers arrived. The witnesses said they assumed that by "plans" the two men meant hiking into the canyon, but Ken Phillips believes that the Twiggs brothers just went across the road and waited in the scrubby piñon-juniper forest there while the rangers cleared the wreck.

Beyond the tow truck and the rangers directing traffic, they would have seen the afternoon's shadows crawling across the canyon's far walls, picking out the huge, hallucinatory, floridly named formations—Vishnu Temple, Wotans Throne, Ottoman Amphitheatre. It is a landscape suited to an apocalyptic frame of mind. An hour after the last rangers left, while dusk was falling, the Twiggs brothers approached two tourists, who had stopped their rental car to admire the view. A .38 revolver was displayed. The Twiggs brothers got into the car and drove away.

Now they were in trouble with the law.

From the towed car, park rangers had already deduced who they were. They had called Kellee Twiggs, Travis's wife, in Virginia. She had missed a call from her husband earlier that afternoon, she said; he had left no message. He and Will had disappeared a few days before. She was stunned to hear that they were in Arizona. She explained about the P.T.S.D. and said that Travis had been "out of his mind" the last time she saw him. He was a highly trained marine—a martial-arts instructor, weapons expert, and skilled combat tracker. "I'm very scared," she said. "I don't want anything bad to happen to him or your people." Anyone who approached him should use his nickname, Tebeaux; it might help him understand that he was in America and that they were not the enemy. She added that her husband's combat flashbacks were worse if he had been drinking. (In the towed car, the rangers found beer cans and an empty fifth of Jägermeister.) Will, she said, was not a fighter but might "man up to impress his brother."

Ken Phillips got a photograph of Travis Twiggs. "I've made a lot of wanted posters," he said. "But this was the first time I had to crop out the President." The bulletins that went out over the wires gave both Travis and Will a "violent criminal history," although before the carjacking neither had any such thing. A local lawyer told me that he'd been informed they were extremely heavily armed, although all they had was the .38—"and in Arizona that's not even close." The Twiggs brothers might be bent on committing "suicide by cop," according to one alert. That possibility seems closer to the mark. The two men were certainly leaving the world as they had known it. The lingering, punishing question is why. Travis, who had two young daughters whom he doted on, might have believed that he was back in Iraq. Will's thinking was more opaque. They drove into the night, and there is

no record that they ever spoke again to anyone but each other. Two days later, they were dead.

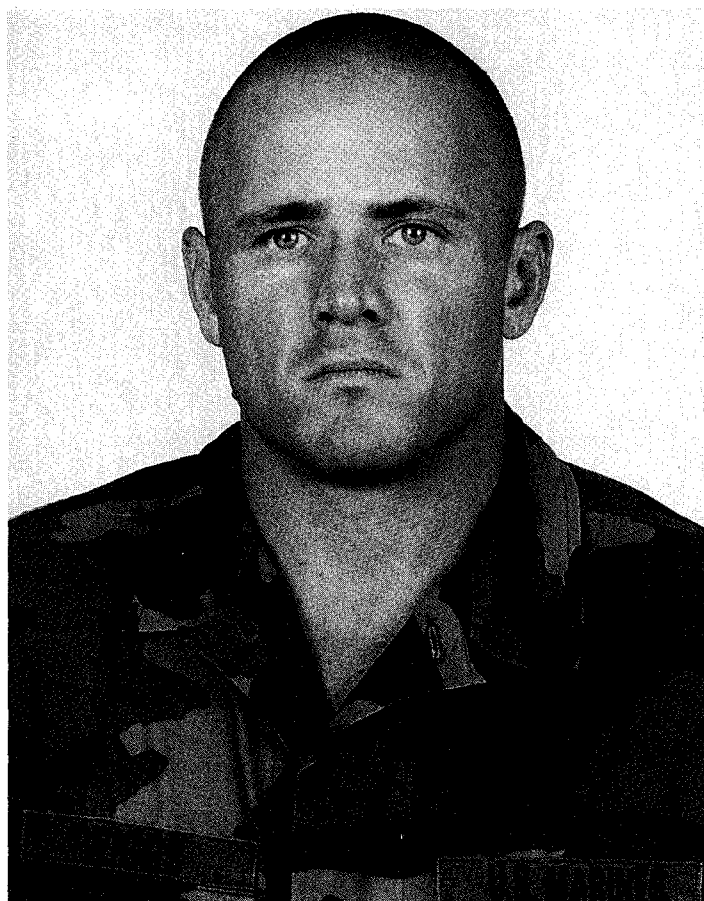
The dartboard on the back porch had Osama bin Laden's face on it, and the wings on the darts were red, white, and blue. Kellee Twiggs was cooking jambalaya. "You cut him and he bled green," she said, flinging shrimp into a pot. She meant that her late husband's devotion to the Marine Corps was total. A portrait of Twiggs in full dress uniform hung near the front door of her house, a few miles south of Quantico, in Virginia. A shadow box of his medals and ribbons stood near the dining-room table. His ashes sat on a mantel in a brass case decorated with the Marine Corps eagle, globe, and anchor.

I heard the same thing from Twiggs's fellow-marines. "He was the strongest person I ever knew in the Marine Corps," Chris Wahl, who served under Twiggs for four years, including two deployments to Iraq, and now owns a bar in Buffalo, said. "Just a sick motherfucker all around, and I mean sick in the best way possible. He knew how to lead men."

Kellee's landlady, Pamela Beggan, told me, "I'm not a big fan of the military, but I really liked Travis. He just had a wide streak of goodness. He always seemed a little over the top in terms of physical energy—he'd work out in the basement at 3 A.M. for a couple of hours before he went to work—but I just put that down to being a marine."

Kellee and Travis met when she was five and he was eight and they lived on the same block in New Orleans. "He loved Rambo," she said. "When we played hide-and-seek, you had to be on Tebeaux's team, or you'd get the bejeezus scared out of you." Kellee is a trim, lively woman with short, hennaed hair and a lush Louisiana accent. She was wearing jeans and a burnt-orange T-shirt. Tebeaux is Cajun; it means "handsome little man." Kellee

and Travis both came from large, blended families. Travis was a middle brother. "Will was the smart one," Kellee said. "He read the paper. Tebeaux was the mischievous one." Will and Travis idolized an uncle, Ricky Taylor, who had been an infantryman in Vietnam. Another uncle, Dave Twiggs, had been badly wounded there. "It was the eighties," Kellee recalled. "MTV was just coming out. So we'd use



Travis Twiggs was deployed five times, and struggled with P.T.S.D.

tennis racquets and get up there and air-guitar it. Dire Straits, Phil Collins, Pink Floyd."

Travis enlisted in 1993, and Kellee was in college when he came home from the Marines to visit. "He always had long hair. Then, to see him, in 1994, all buff, with his head shaved, it was, like, *hello*." They married in 1999, and Twiggs tried civilian life for a year, working for his father's shipping agency in New Orleans. "He was a hit," his father, Douglas Twiggs, said. "Tebeaux made so many friends on the river. The blacks called him T-Bone. But he just didn't have enough structure here. He needed regimentation."

Kellee Twiggs said, "Tebeaux liked being in his cammies and being in the

woods, teaching boys things, how to survive. We got back in the Marines in January, 2001." She served up plates of jambalaya for her daughters—Ireland, nine, and America, four. Then she shoed them into the living room, where a wide-screen TV was playing cartoons, and went out to the back porch for a cigarette.

Travis had acquired a new nickname in the military. Apparently, after pulling an extra-long duty shift at Guantánamo Bay, he had fallen into a heavy sleep, and a general had stuck a sign on him: "Here Lies the Mighty War Pig." After his marriage and reenlistment, the young marines in Travis's platoon began calling Kellee Mrs. War Pig. The Twiggses' house near Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, became a surrogate home for many of Travis's men—they were invited for Sunday barbecues, holiday meals. "He was like their dad," Kellee said. "They came to him at 4 A.M. with their problems—financial, marital, whatever—and he always got up." And when his unit—Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment—was sent to war, Kellee volunteered as a liaison between those deployed and their families.

Her right foot and ankle carry a huge tattoo, "Travis," in Gothic script. She noticed me studying it. "He had my name all over him," she said. "On the top of his left foot. On dog tags off his shoulder. 'Kellee,' 'Ireland.' He hadn't got 'America' put on there yet." On his right forearm, she said, Travis had "Gladiator"; on his left, "Spartan." "My husband was my everything," she said. "He was my hero."

Kellee flicked a butt off the porch. It was dusk, hot and sticky. A wide slope of lawn ran down to a trampoline. There were pine trees and pin oaks. America charged out of the house to report a misbehaving dog. Kellee held her daughter's face. "You got your daddy's catfish mouth," she said. "See that?" She pointed to a photograph of Travis scowling; the resemblance to his daughter was strong. "Me

and Ireland used to tell him, 'You're home now, you can smile. You can stop being a badass,'” Kellee said.

Douglas Twiggs told me later, “Tebeaux was like a big kid. When Ireland got a pink Barbie Jeep, motorized, he jumped on it and drove around the yard. That just tickled the kids. He'd tell his marines when they came to his house, 'I'm Tebeaux today, but on Monday I'll be Sergeant Twiggs.'” And for years Travis did manage, it seems, to leave War Pig at the front door. But after each overseas deployment the transition to family life grew more difficult. “I was more irritable, paranoid for no reason, unable to sleep,” he wrote, in the *Marine Corps Gazette*. He was not being forced to return to Iraq, though—he was volunteering. The moment that a new deployment, with Kellee's tearful acquiescence, was in sight, he wrote, “my symptoms went away. After all, I was going back to the fight, back to shared adversity, where the tempo is high and our adrenaline pulses through our veins like hot blood.”

He didn't talk much, at home, about what he did “in theatre.” On one tour, his unit was assigned to guard the United States Embassy, a task that included searching Baghdad, both on foot and in mechanized patrols, for insurgents launching attacks on the Green Zone. On another tour, in 2005-06, his unit spent seven months fighting in Saqlawiyah, northwest of Falluja, in Anbar Province. Mike Tucker, an embedded writer and former marine who went on patrol with Twiggs, wrote, in “Ronin,” a book published last January, that Twiggs was “regarded in the U.S. military as one of the best combat trackers alive.” His men adored him, Tucker said.

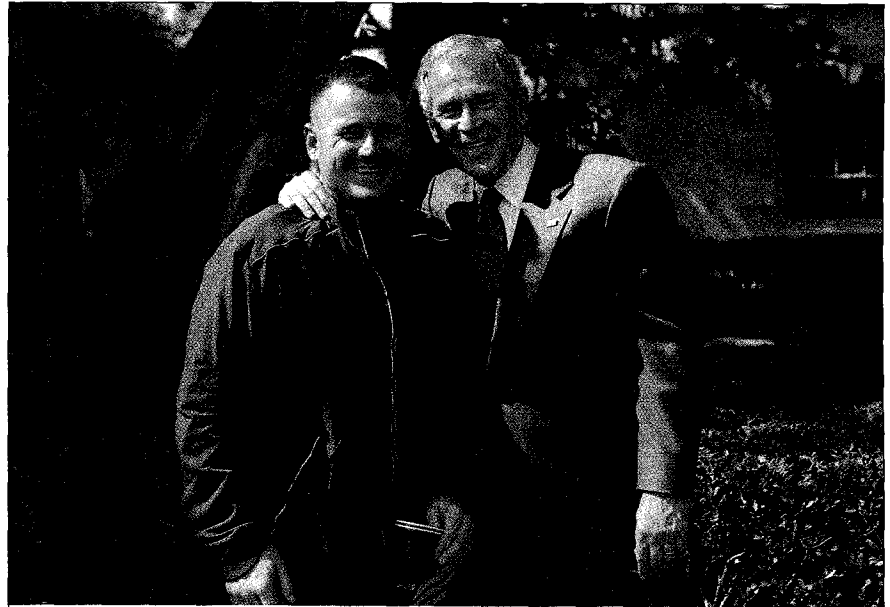
Travis never doubted the wisdom of the war, Kellee said, and he was frustrated by the press coverage it got. “He could see how it was helping people. But all they showed were the bad things. His thing was, everybody flew flags after 9/11 for seven, eight months. Then it got 'old.' He was pissed about that. Americans didn't appreciate the military. Then, after his third tour, we'd be watching the news and there would be some horrible American shit going on—some adoption-fraud scam, or some people who threw a baby into a lake in a garbage bag. And Tebeaux

would just start crying and shouting, 'What the fuck am I fighting for?'”

Kellee said, “Nobody even noticed it in Two-Six”—Travis's battalion—“but I did. He got so twitchy, it became impossible to cuddle with him. He loved movies, but he couldn't sit still to watch one. You could just see the wheels turning. You wanted to keep him busy, keep him

appy was to cut the grass, with his iPod on,” Kellee told me. “He did that a lot.”

It was dark now, with a full moon rising. Kellee hadn't touched her food. “He volunteered,” she said. “We volunteered. He did what he did because he was fucking awesome, and he kicked ass because he loved his country. And when he got sick, got saddened, his govern-



*To The Family of Staff Sergeant Travis Twiggs, USMC
With respect and appreciation,*

talking about things so he wouldn't start talking about other things. He'd get upset when people asked him stupid things, like did he kill anybody, and he wouldn't talk, but other times he'd start talking about I.E.D.s, and how horrible they were, how they put soap in them, so it sticks to you, and how they can detonate them with anything—a cell phone, a walkie-talkie. He'd hear a car coming up our gravel road here and he'd just hit the floor, just *bam*, because the tires crunching sounded like machine-gun fire to him. Or he'd just go sit upstairs and watch for lights—watch for Iraqis, because that's what he used to do in Iraq. I'd call his name, get him back to bed, and the only way I could get him to sleep was to put him in a bear hug and rock him. Then he'd sleep. But as soon as I moved he'd wake up.”

Travis started drinking heavily, and having trouble concentrating. “His ther-

ment, his Marine Corps, let him down.”

She started to cry. “He was so beautiful,” she said.

It has been called by different names—Ishell shock, battle fatigue—in different eras, but P.T.S.D., in its combat form, has been around for as long as war has. Odysseus and his men had it. Although Twiggs used the word “paranoid” to describe his mood when he was Stateside, the more accurate term, used by P.T.S.D. researchers, might be “hypervigilance”—a normal adaptive strategy for surviving combat, except that the “on” switch is not easily turned off. Dr. Jonathan Shay, a P.T.S.D. specialist, thinks that even calling it a disorder is misleading: P.T.S.D. is an injury. There are degrees of damage, ranging from standard combat stress, which can be treated with a few days' rest, to full-blown complex P.T.S.D., which is very

‘I’ve made a lot of wanted posters,’ a National Park Service ranger said. ‘But this was the first time I had to crop out the President.’

difficult to treat, let alone cure. It is best understood, though, as a psychic wound, one that can be crippling, even fatal, in its myriad complications.

Compared with other American wars, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan seem to be producing victims at a high rate. A recent RAND Corporation study estimated that three hundred thousand veterans of America's post-9/11 wars—nearly twenty per cent of those who have served—are suffering from P.T.S.D. or major depression, and many more cases are expected to surface in the years ahead. This elevated rate is generally attributed to the rigors of a long war being fought without conscription: multiple deployments and heavy use of National Guard and reserve units. And on the ground, at unit level, the discouragement of anyone with stress symptoms from asking for help is intense. The same RAND study found that, mainly because of the stigma still attached to P.T.S.D., only half of those afflicted have sought treatment.

The suicide rate among veterans and active-duty military personnel has been rising as well. The number of soldiers who killed themselves last year was the highest since the Army began keeping records, in 1980. When Dr. Ira Katz, the Department of Veterans Affairs chief of mental services, learned earlier this year that preliminary internal reports suggested that a thousand veterans in V.A. care were attempting suicide each month, he sent a colleague an e-mail saying, "Shh! . . . Is this something we should (carefully) address ourselves in some sort of release before somebody stumbles on it?" Another e-mail, written in March, 2008, by Dr. Norma J. Perez, a P.T.S.D. program coördinator in Texas, said, "Given that we are having more and more compensation seeking veterans, I'd like to suggest that you refrain from giving a diagnosis of PTSD straight out."

Robert Gates, the Secretary of Defense, is said to be considering making some P.T.S.D. sufferers eligible for the Purple Heart. Wounded veterans are symbolically popular figures, if individually painful, and sometimes frightening. Certainly, most politicians want to be associated with their cause. And yet the difficulty of maintaining the troop levels necessary for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has placed the Bush Administration at odds with veterans' groups. All

such organizations supported what became known as the New G.I. Bill, which would provide increased education benefits. The Administration opposed it, on the ground that the appeal of a college education might sap troop levels. John McCain, himself a veteran, agreed. Ultimately, at the end of June, President Bush signed a modified version of the bill.

In the Marine Corps, the Wounded Warrior Regiment, created in 2007, marks a step toward the assumption of longer-term institutional responsibility for casualties, both physical and mental. "Used to be, we met them at the hospital door, shook their hand, thanked them for their service, gave them a discharge, and said goodbye," Colonel Greg Boyle, the regiment's commander, told me. "Now it's marine for life." Boyle did not mean that there would always be a place, a job, for disabled marines but that his regiment would track them and offer support throughout their post-discharge lives. P.T.S.D. victims are among those for whom the regiment is designed. It was Boyle who decided to send Travis Twiggs to the White House. "Nice guy. I liked him," Boyle said.

Travis Twiggs didn't announce his P.T.S.D. at first. When he returned from Iraq in 2006, after his third tour there, he was transferred to the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, at Quantico. His superiors believed that his extensive field experience would be useful in the evaluation of new weapons systems and equipment. But without his beloved combat platoon, Kellee said, Travis was bereft: "He felt like he wasn't in the Marines anymore." And, at his office job in Virginia, his P.T.S.D. quickly became impossible to ignore.

His sergeant major recognized the symptoms, and, in June, sent him to a physician's assistant, who prescribed the antidepressants Zoloft and trazodone. Antidepressants and antipsychotics are the main drugs used to control P.T.S.D. But, while his medications were being evaluated and adjusted, Twiggs was, by his own account, blunting their effect by mixing them with alcohol. He told Kellee that he couldn't stand to look in a mirror. He was racked with guilt, in particular over the deaths of two young lance corporals in his platoon. The only thing that really helped, he wrote, was returning to

Iraq. He went, in late 2006, on a weapons-testing mission for the Warfighting Lab, and, once again, his symptoms vanished. He wasn't fighting, but at least he was in theatre. He was also good at his job.

But once he was home, in January, 2007, "he went batshit," Kellee said. His P.T.S.D.—anger, sadness, drinking, flashbacks—took a toll on their marriage. She went to counselling for P.T.S.D. spouses—sessions led by Travis's therapist. "I didn't really see the point," she says now. "I mean, a twenty-two-year-old girl gets up and says, 'He's got guns all over the house, including a 9-mm. he puts between the mattress and the box spring. And one night I woke up and he had the gun up to my head, calling me an Iraqi. So I had to talk him all through that, and get him to put the gun down.' How long do you think *that* marriage will last?"

Travis soon landed in a locked ward at Bethesda Naval Hospital. "At Bethesda I was not exactly a model patient," he wrote in his article. "I was experiencing psychosis where I would fight my way through the hallways and clear rooms as if I were back in theater. The hospital police would have to be called in to secure me." He was later transferred to a veterans' hospital in West Virginia, where he saw several doctors, "and it seemed that each one had a different medicine. I often wondered if they ever talked with each other." At one point, he wrote, he was taking twelve different medications a day—Kellee recalls the number reaching nineteen, and says that the drugs turned her husband into "a zombie"—"and I was experiencing visual and audible hallucinations that I firmly believe were a direct result of being overmedicated. On any given day I was sad, mad, or depressed. I often felt that I was weak and not worthy of calling myself a Marine anymore. I slept covered in sweat every night and constantly shook uncontrollably. I got to the point where I believed PTSD was nothing more than an acronym created for weak Marines."

This was raw, vivid stuff for the *Marine Corps Gazette*. Twiggs went on to describe his recovery, through therapy and reduced medication, and wrote, "I am back doing what I do best and what brings me the most enjoyment—training Marines and sailors." He offered bullet-point advice to policymakers and P.T.S.D. sufferers, and included his e-mail address in case anyone in trouble

wanted to contact him. But the article was primarily confessional: "My only regrets are how I let my command down after they had put so much trust in me and how I let my family down by pushing them away." His P.T.S.D. was "not completely gone," he wrote, but "life with my family is wonderful again."

Twiggs was sought after as a motivational speaker, and he became the Wounded Warrior Regiment's P.T.S.D. poster child. His symptoms, however, returned. He became impossible to live with. He was sent back to Bethesda Naval Hospital and was once again, Kellee thinks, overmedicated.

The experience that continued to cut Travis Twiggs most deeply was the loss of Jared Kremm and Robert Eckfield, Jr., the young lance corporals in his platoon. They were killed at Saqlawiyah, on October 27, 2005. Golf Company's firebase was an old Baath Party hotel near a main supply route to Jordan and Syria. The hotel compound was taking daily rocket and mortar attacks from Al Qaeda in Iraq and from the Black Flags Brigades, a Sunni insurgent group. Twiggs was leading foot patrols through villages and along the banks of the Euphrates, searching for insurgents and for weapons caches. He was in his element. But some of the facilities at the hotel were poorly secured. There was no running water, and portable toilets had been set out in tents in the compound. These outhouses were vulnerable; Twiggs later told Kellee that he thought that the toilets should not have been outside at all, but in some downwind corner of the sprawling hotel—the stench would be worth the increased security. But he was not the commanding officer on the base. Still, experienced noncommissioned officers regularly let their superiors know what they should be doing. His unit had been at Saqlawiyah for only a month when Kremm and Eckfield took a direct mortar hit in the rest-room tents.

Twiggs was one of the first on the scene. Kremm had been hit in the face; Twiggs watched him die. Eckfield was alive but had severe head wounds. Eckfield was transported to a hospital near Falluja, and died that night. Kremm was twenty-five. He was from Hauppauge, Long Island, where he had been a high-school football star. Eckfield was twenty-three, and from Ohio. Twiggs had trained them

both at Camp Lejeune, where they had been regulars at his and Kellee's house. The Defense Department announced that they had died "from an indirect fire explosion," and gave their families uninformative explanations.

Christopher Lowman, who was one of Twiggs's closest friends, and who was also a staff sergeant in Two-Six—he is now a gunnery sergeant, and back in Iraq—told me, "When you train these boys, you tell them every day, 'You do what I tell you, exactly what I tell you, and I will get you home.'" Mike Tucker talked to Twiggs the night that Kremm and Eckfield died, and later wrote, in an e-mail, "Something broke in Travis. . . . That night, he told me, 'I feel responsible for their deaths.'" On a tribute Web site, FallenHeroesMemorial.com, Twiggs wrote, "I wish that I could erase that horrible day from my memory . . . but I can't."

Travis's family, most of whom live in and around New Orleans, remained largely unaware of his struggles. His brother Will was an exception. Will came to Bethesda and spent a week at Travis's bedside in March. In a journal that he kept on Navy Lodge stationery, Will wrote, "My loyalty has unequivocally been to Tebeaux. I hope God doesn't take him away from me too."

"Will thought of Tebeaux as a hero," Kellee said. "And it really bothered him when he realized how bad he was hurting."

"Everybody was crazy about Will except Will," Nancy Twiggs said. She is Will and Travis's stepmother. She and Douglas reared them both, for the most part, in Ama, Louisiana, twenty miles upriver from New Orleans. They still live there, in a one-story brick house with a big yard backing onto a patch of woods. Nancy put on a video of Will, eleven years old and flaxen-haired, competing in a citywide spelling bee. He gets "aphasia" right, then wins it with "ineluctable." Travis, age nine, rushes onto the stage and hugs his brother. After the video ended, we sat in silence for a minute while Douglas and Nancy composed themselves.

"It's like they're still here," Nancy said.

"We thought Will might be a sportswriter," Douglas said.

Nancy and Douglas Twiggs are hospitable, heartbroken people. Will, they say, was a devoted, protective older brother. He and Travis were especially close. Each

could mimic the other's voice, and, even as adults, they liked to trick people over the phone, pretending to be the other. Will was disappointed, they thought, when Travis, in high school, suddenly decided to go live with their mother, in Miami. It was the first big decision he had made without consulting Will.

Will joined the Navy out of high school. In a snapshot taken aboard a ship in San Francisco, he looks, in Navy whites, very young and frail, like a bird that has left the nest too soon. The physical contrast with Travis, who was six inches shorter but many pounds of muscle heavier, is stark. Will did not last long in the Navy. He went to work for a German-owned ship-chartering company in New Orleans, where Douglas, too, worked at the time. Will did logistics, and seemed to do well, but he turned down the company's offer to send him to Hamburg for advanced training. "He didn't want to leave New Orleans," Douglas said. "Both of his friends lived here." He smiled faintly at the old joke.

Will was passionate about his friends and his family. When his uncle Ricky, the Vietnam War infantryman, died, Will was inconsolable. This loss evidently intensified his fear of losing Tebeaux. "He loved showing Tebeaux off when he would visit," Douglas said. "He was so proud of him."

"We all were," Nancy said. "Tebeaux made a better American out of me. He really believed in this country. I remember watching the first airstrikes on Afghanistan on TV. I thought, There's Tebeaux. He's in there, and he's going to catch Osama bin Laden. I truly believed he would find him, and that his picture was going to be on the front of the *Picayune*, saying, 'I got him.'"

"Oh, I did, too."

Whenever Travis was Stateside, he and Will would try to rendezvous at NASCAR races around the South. Both men idolized Dale Earnhardt, Sr. Earnhardt was killed at the Daytona 500 in February, 2001; the Twiggs brothers were watching in a highwayside sports bar in Florida, having failed to make it to the track in time for the race. They embarked together on an epic bender of mourning, greatly worrying their families.

Will was jealous, Kellee thought, of Travis's devotion to her and their children, and Douglas and Nancy don't dis-

agree. "He couldn't appreciate that Tebeaux had found the love of his life, and had kids that let him love even more, and that none of it meant he couldn't still love his brothers," Douglas said.

Will's own love life was chaotic and tormented. He had a string of girlfriends, and seemed drawn to troubled women, usually older than he was, often with drug habits. "They always seemed to have kids and work in bars," a friend of Will's told me. "Drama, drama, and more drama." Will became attached to the children of his girlfriends, and was distraught after one boy attempted suicide by slitting his wrists after Will left his mother. With his last girlfriend, the married woman, Will convinced himself that her husband was after him, and started sleeping with a pistol and a knife under his pillow. Will had his own drug problems, and a drinking problem.

He left his job with the German company for one selling marine radar systems. He travelled for work, and earned a good salary, but at some point, according to Douglas, he simply lost interest. He became increasingly withdrawn, and seemed happiest under his Walkman, listening to classic rock and country. He quit his sales job just before Katrina. Afterward, he began doing construction work, but inconsistently. He lost weight, and let his hair grow long. "I started calling him Will o' the Wisp," Douglas said. "It was like watching one of those Japanese planes you used to see in those old black-and-white movies, shot down and spiralling toward the ground."

A silence followed. It had been nine weeks since their sons' deaths.

"Neither would ever have done it alone," Nancy said.

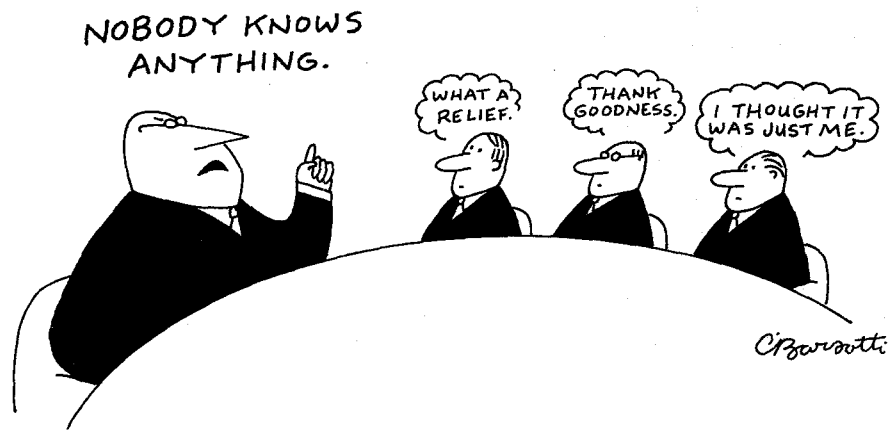
"We sit out on the patio just about every night and try to figure out what went wrong, that our boys would do a final," Douglas said.

"I almost feel like it's getting worse," Nancy said. "Like the shock is wearing off."

"It's like a big wave in the surf that just knocks you sideways and holds you down, no matter how you fight it."

After Travis was again released from Bethesda, in April, he and Kellee tried to regroup.

"He had bad thoughts," Kellee said. "I had bad thoughts. But I told him, 'We are



badasses. What you've done in the Marines, what I've done as a Marine wife. We're awesome. We're killer.' And we agreed, we're in it together."

Travis had moved out of the house, into the barracks at Quantico, but he and Kellee tried to do things that would help them feel like a family. They took the girls to Washington, D.C., for a weekend. They walked the Mall, took in the sights.

Travis was at odds, however, with his colleagues at the Warfighting Lab. He believed that he had received a promotion, to gunnery sergeant, from the Wounded Warrior Regiment. But he was still officially under the command of the Warfighting Lab, and his recent performance there was not thought to merit promotion. (What he had actually received from the Wounded Warriors was a billet to gunnery sergeant, not a promotion, Colonel Boyle explained to me.) Already feeling insecure about his standing as a marine, Twiggs took the dispute as a rejection, a personal humiliation. He wanted to go to Louisiana, where one of his grandmothers was dying, but his commanders considered him too unstable to travel alone. They wanted to send an escort with him. Twiggs saw more humiliation. He could not show up at his grandmother's accompanied by a guard.

He and Kellee planned another family weekend, but Travis didn't show up. Kellee was furious. When he finally arrived, on Sunday evening, he was drunk. She wouldn't let him in the house, or allow him to see the girls. Instead, they sat together on the front porch and talked for half an hour. Her regrets from that night are ferocious. "If I had just brought him inside," she said. "Just taken him upstairs

and made love to him, or tried to. Just told him it would be O.K., played that role." She never saw him again.

He drove on to Louisiana, on unauthorized leave, in their blue Toyota, with America's car seat still in the back. He met up with Will, and together they went to see their dying grandmother. He visited other relatives, including Douglas and Nancy. They, too, are plagued with regrets. "I told him, 'Tebeaux, you're really not acting like my son,'" Douglas said. "If I'd known anything about P.T.S.D., I never would have said that." Nancy recalled a letter Travis had sent from Iraq to be read at his younger sister's wedding. "It said, 'You may not be able to see me, but I'm there.' I thought of that when we saw him so messed up. We could see him, but he wasn't there. It just wasn't him." Douglas said, "None of us had ever seen him like that. It was like he was in a trance. He didn't sound like himself. He was flatlining, like he had no personality. He had lost all that stuff of his, that love of trying to fool people. He said, 'Dad, I think I'm very sick.'"

Travis and Will were drinking while they made the family rounds. "They were acting very funny, real cocky, smart-alecky," Nancy said. They borrowed money from Kellee's mother, Debbie Graham, and from one of Will's ex-girlfriends. Douglas offered to fly back to Maryland with Travis—he would buy the tickets. Travis asked for cash instead. When Douglas refused, Travis insulted his father. By Friday, May 9th, he and Will had left Louisiana.

They told no one where they were going. Debbie Graham, who was close friends with Will, told her family she was afraid that the brothers were going

to pull something like the ending of "Thelma & Louise," the 1991 film in which the main characters, played by Susan Sarandon and Geena Davis, drive into the Grand Canyon. Kellee rejects the analogy to this day, even though her mother turned out to be weirdly prescient. Travis loved movies, but, Kellee said, "my husband was so manly, he would never go out for a chick flick."

Travis and Will drove west. Near Killeen, Texas, they dropped in on their uncle Dave Twiggs, arriving in a rainstorm on the night of May 9th. According to Douglas, Dave was disturbed by his nephews' appearance and sat up late with them. He advised Travis to turn himself in at Fort Hood, which was just up the road, in the morning. Travis said he would. Dave loaned them a hundred dollars. Travis and Will stayed up into the night and left in the morning, but they did not stop at Fort Hood.

In El Paso, they dropped in on Kim Barron, an old friend of Will's. She, too, was disturbed, particularly by Will's appearance. He was gaunt, and unusually quiet. He grabbed her and hugged her and told her he loved her. Travis, by contrast, seemed fine. He talked with her husband, an Army lieutenant colonel, while she tried to talk to Will. His face wore a stricken expression that she thought she recognized—she had been his confidante through many love troubles. If the brothers stayed the night, which she and her husband urged them to

do, Will would tell her what was going on, Kim thought. But they stayed for only half an hour. Travis said that he had to get back East; if he'd known how far it was, he never would have come. Later, the Twiggs family wondered what to make of that. It did not sound like the remark of a man who had entered on a suicide pact. Will made a little joke about the long drive. At least, he said, he had good company and good music.

When Kellee got the Toyota back, months later, Pink Floyd's "The Wall" was in the CD player. There were other CDs in the car—by Linkin Park, Blue October, Enya—but the lyrics of "The Wall," a dark, solipsistic rock opera, fit well with P.T.S.D.: "Mother will they put me in the firing line?/Mother am I really dying?" And: "I don't need no arms around me/And I don't need no drugs to calm me." And: "Would you like to call the cops?/Do you think it's time I stopped?" And: "Goodbye cruel world,/I'm leaving you today."

Travis, while he was hospitalized, made paintings—lurid depictions of his nightmares. "Stained" shows a marine holding an eyeball, blood everywhere. "The Wall" is a self-portrait showing a marine in uniform clinging hopelessly, with bleeding fingernails, to a brick wall. The darkness of the paintings is profound. Leafing through them in a basement hallway, next to Travis's weightlifting setup, Kellee said, "I think guilt is what killed him, what made him let go, made him disconnect, from us, from ev-

everything. He thought he'd let us down, let the families down, let the boys down who died, let the command down."

Will's journals also seemed to be full of morbid brooding. He quoted rock lyrics, with multiple underlining: "These broken dreams have GOT TO END." To a girlfriend, he wrote, "There's only a couple of options to get you out of my life: 1) Die 2) Make you hate me." But Kim Barron doesn't think that Will was suicidal. They had discussed it in the past, she said, and she believed she knew his mind. Still, his determination to look after his younger brother, to stick by him, was, she admitted, a formidable force. "He was always crazy overboard protective," she said.

The Grand Canyon, of course, is the biggest, baddest, most all-American way to go; Evel Knievel always wanted to jump it. Thelma and Louise, for that matter, were not ordinary "chicks." They were stylish outlaws, with a battalion of cops on their tail. But dyadic death, which refers both to suicide pacts and to homicide-suicides, is generally less glossy in life. Even on a great stage, like the Grand Canyon, it's a slinking exit, a slithering away from pain and human connection, suffused with shame, not a blaze of glory.

Kellee also thought that it required two, that the fraternal combination made the worst possible: "Tebeaux was a ticking bomb, and Will was the fuse. Will made him truly not give a shit anymore." Later, she said, "I think Will helped Tebeaux make up his mind."

What is broken, what is lost, above all, with complex P.T.S.D. is social trust, according to Jonathan Shay, one of its most astute analysts. Wounded warriors come home and feel that they can trust no one—not even their spouses. Under the pressure of constant, violent, involuntary psychic contraction (terror, self-loathing) and expansion (rage, grandiosity, mania), character itself shrivels. With loyal, troubled, self-destructive Will, Travis may have felt that he had found the one person he could trust, who would stay beside him to the end.

Did the Marine Corps abandon Travis? Kellee thought that, instead of being put in Bethesda for a second time, he should have been sent to a P.T.S.D. program in New Jersey, where she had heard that one-on-one cognitive therapy was being practiced, with some success, and



"Let's remake an old classic with worse everything!"

Travis thought so, too, she says. But she is reluctant to say too much about the Marine Corps' role, since she and her daughters rely on military death benefits. Chris Wahl said, "War Pig was sick. The Marine Corps just filled him up with drugs, trying to shut him up." Major Valerie A. Jackson, of the Marines, who is a friend of the Twiggs family, wrote to the *Marine Corps Gazette*, "There are many programs in place now to help those suffering from PTSD. By the time Twiggs got involved in these though, it was far too late. His problems should have been identified after each deployment, and when the commands realized that he needed serious help (after the second deployment), he should have been prevented from deploying again. Period. I realize that a symptom of the disease is the overarching need to be in the fight. But there comes a point when someone with some influence needs to say, 'No, Staff Sergeant. Enough is enough. You've done your part.'" Major Jackson added, "The Twiggs family should not be mourning the loss of husband, father, and son. We let them down, and we let SSgt Twiggs down."

Colonel Boyle, of the Wounded Warrior Regiment, who had not known Twiggs in the early phase of his P.T.S.D., defended the command's treatment of him in its later phase. "He was actually kept around in the Marine Corps a lot longer than he would have been before the war," he told me. "People really wanted him to make it."

Douglas and Nancy Twiggs just wish that they had been kept informed. "I didn't even know what P.T.S.D. was," Douglas said. "But the military knew. I never would have left his side if I'd known. They should put on my gravestone that I didn't know what P.T.S.D. was till it was too late for my son."

Douglas is also unhappy that the Marine Corps did not intervene to change the course of the pursuit in Arizona. "They knew he had P.T.S.D.," he said. "And yet they ran him down like a dog."

On the morning of May 14th, around 9 A.M., at a Border Patrol checkpoint east of Yuma, almost four hundred miles from the Grand Canyon, Travis and Will Twiggs were stopped for routine questioning. Forty-one hours had

passed since they failed to drive into the gorge. Travis, who was wearing shorts, a short-sleeved blue shirt, and no shoes, was driving. He presented his military I.D., Will his Louisiana driver's license. They were on a little-used frontage road next to Interstate 8, and the Border Patrol officers asked them to pull over for a secondary inspection. Travis floored it instead.

They headed east on the interstate. The white Dodge Caliber hatchback they had stolen didn't handle well above a hundred miles an hour. A Border Patrol helicopter and cruisers from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Department and the Arizona Department of Public Safety joined the chase. Police radios crackled with bits and pieces about the fleeing suspects. One abbreviated transmission said, "Subject has ability to display emotion and then revert to military."

Did Travis believe that he was back in Iraq? The Sonoran Desert, sear and zipping past, could have enhanced that idea, certainly. The whapping of chopper blades, the hostile vehicles, the heat of the chase—the adrenaline rush had to be familiar. It could even have been soothing. West of Gila Bend, the speeding Caliber suddenly left the highway and headed north on Painted Rock Road. When the road ended, after sixteen miles, at a dam, Travis pulled a high-speed U-turn and drove straight at his pursuers. They scattered without firing a shot. The chase returned to Interstate 8 and resumed its eastward progress. Whether he believed this was combat or not, Travis seemed to have settled on a mortal determination, traditional among marines, not to be taken prisoner. Beer cans started flying out of the stolen car.

South of the highway, the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range gave way to the Table Top Wilderness. The road signs were now for Tucson and Casa Grande. They had travelled a hundred and sixty miles. On a long downgrade, great saguaro cacti—mutilated, many of them, by disease or shotgun fire—stood on both sides of the highway. At Milepost 161, a tribal policeman from the Tohono O'odham reservation waited with a set of spike strips. The reservation was far to the south, but he had heard a

call for assistance. The spikes blew out the car's tires. The Caliber hurtled and swerved down the highway for another mile before plowing off the pavement into a weedy shoulder and sliding to a halt.

Police surrounded the vehicle but kept their distance, particularly after they saw a revolver being waved from the driver's window. Then they heard shots; some heard one, others heard two; there

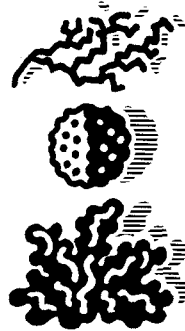
were actually three. It was later determined that Travis Twiggs had pulled the trigger each time. The first shot was fired at point-blank range through the left temple of Willard Twiggs, and it was fatal. The second was fired from under Travis's own chin. The bullet came out through his left cheek. It was not fatal. The third shot, fired

at point-blank range, went through his right temple—fatal. Will's head had fallen back against the seat. Travis slumped into his brother's lap.

The assembled peace officers approached the vehicle with extreme caution. For the next several hours, they worked, with ropes, two bomb robots, and something called a water charge—which they used to blow up a Marine Corps-issue backpack in the car—to insure that the crime scene was safe for investigators to enter. Having been told that Travis Twiggs was a combat veteran, their concern was that the car might contain an improvised explosive device. It did not.

When Travis phoned from the Grand Canyon, failing to leave a message, Kellee said, "He called my cell. But it doesn't get reception here. He *knew* that. I leave my cell in the car. I don't know why that idiot didn't call the house." She took a long, ragged breath. "My hardest thing is the last ten minutes. I can't understand that. Because Tebeaux would never hurt anybody. And"—she mimed shooting someone, then shooting herself—"I just don't get that. I'm having a real hard time with it. I can't believe he would leave me, can't believe he would leave us, leave our girls."

She took more deep breaths. "But he really left us a long time ago. He tried to come back. But he couldn't. That was not my husband out there." ♦



FICTION

THREE

BY ANDREA LEE



This is an account of three people who died. Quite recently, one after the other, in the space of six months. A reclusive old noblewoman, a painter of murals, and a philandering handyman. Ombretta, Francescon, and Remo. They weren't important, as the wide world defines "importance," though the muralist did have something of a reputation among the fabulous and the rich. No, they were people whose orbit was small, residents of a provincial place, the town in the north of Italy where I live. Though all three had met, they weren't friends; they were too different in age, social position, and degree of sinfulness. At the same time, as I can see only now, they were alike in their possession of a purity of spirit that shone—through ordinary or foolish or desperate actions—with a steady sidereal gleam.

I was connected to all three through the family I married into: an insular, blue-blooded Ligurian clan ensconced hierarchically in a set of old terraced villas, stacked one above the other, like the layers of a cake, on a hillside overlooking the Malaspina castle. In my private drama—my ongoing adventure with my husband and his family—Ombretta, Francescon, and Remo were bit players to whom I gave little thought until they vanished from the scene.

But lately I've been waking up every night, as I lie beside my husband in the iron canopy bed that Remo forged for us as a wedding present. What wakes me is the feeling of being in company—gently included in a quartet as watchful and discreet as the bedpost evangelists in the nursery prayer. And inevitably the same three names are present to me. As if they had come to remind me that there is something I need to do: perhaps simply to tell what I know of their discarded lives.

I

The oldest, and the first to leave, was my mother-in-law, Ombretta. A dozen years ago, I met her at a Sunday lunch presided over by the eldest of her sons, an occasion on which my husband-to-be, the youngest, presented me to his tribe. I was a dazzled foreigner, the American fiancée, and this was one of those gilded October scenes with which Italy tempts the sojourner: a garden filled with handsome inbred men and women drinking wine with a tang of oak; children in

lace collars and muddy boots playing in the shade of a grand Juvarran façade, smudged with age. As mulberry leaves drifted down like flakes of rust onto the laden table, I gazed out over the panorama of the Magdalene hills, the castle, the distant smokestacks and tenements of the city below, the river plain spreading toward the Alps.

Nonna Ombretta, as they called her, was at the head of the table, a white-haired figure in pearls and a sweater whose color matched her large aquamarine eyes. Her face, with its shaggy black brows, crooked beak of a nose, and tributaries of wrinkles, suggested a battered bust of Tiberius. Yet this overpowering visage, clearly made for tyranny, displayed instead a gentle reticence, a beatific air of restraint that was clearly a choice, even a private indulgence. Her three charming and arrogant sons interpreted it as devotion to them, the familiar domestic martyrdom of a Catholic matriarch, but I felt from the start that it was something stranger, less easy to define. When we were introduced and I first heard her ragged, sweet thread of a voice, with its lilting Venetian accent, I felt a curious jolt of awareness, as one might feel on hearing a bell chime once in the distance.

Ombretta means "little shadow," and I soon saw how well the name suited. Unlike the time-honored image of a mother-in-law, she was never intrusive; she was simply present, a quotidian mystery flickering along the edges of our lives. At first, like all second wives, I wanted to possess my husband entirely, to erase his past, and I kept expecting his mother to be a problem. I studied her, trying to understand how she could be dangerous for me, and was baffled. Problems there were, of course, with my husband, a jaunty egoist with the robust self-absorption of his long-dead father, a dissolute provincial magnate famous for having gambled away the family match factory at the casino in St. Vincent. And many power games confronted me: resentful stepchildren, territorial sisters-in-law, and all the pressures and depredations of a large Italian clan. But Nonna Ombretta kept apart from all this, and I took a big step toward belonging to the family when I first realized that, although its members venerated this mild matriarch, they'd have admired her far more had she been a despot.

Ombretta hardly ever left her house.

With my husband, I visited her on weekends, walking up the stony road from our house, the bottommost of the villas, to the cottage where she lived, on her second son's property: three dark, beam-ceilinged rooms, set between the chapel and a crumbling brick alcove, where someone had propped a wooden sculling shell from the sixties. Half rotted and filled with dead vines, the boat lent an oddly nautical air to Ombretta's end of the garden, where she grew tightly whorled antique roses and huge bushes of lavender. Inside, the fragrance of the flowers mingled with the odor of wood smoke and mildew. We sat in the gloom of giant chests and bookshelves from her girlhood house in Venice, while she served us coffee and dates stuffed with marzipan.

My husband, bored, would work the conversation around to how brilliant he had been as a schoolboy, sometimes even trying to provoke her and me by referring to his early sexual escapades, references that we both blandly ignored. I'd take refuge in trips to the bathroom, passing by Ombretta's conventual single bed and the prie-dieu beside it. I'd sit contemplating her yellowed plastic shower cap, and bottles of home-distilled lavender water, and wondering why, despite the tedium, I always felt refreshed after these visits.

On her coffee table stood an odd piece of antique silver, a lily with seven petals that detached to become miniature silver dishes, a puzzle that children and grandchildren could pull apart to amuse themselves, but only Ombretta could put back together. It sat there in the dim room, like a small, shining secret.

Time passed, and our son and daughter were born and were received by Ombretta with the same absent-minded warmth with which she treated all her grandchildren. I never found myself intimate with her, but a curious admiration had begun to flow between us. She started to ask about the books I wrote, about my trips to literary events in America, and she vouchsafed me glimpses of her youth in Venice. She told me how, daringly for a well-bred girl, she had sailed her own small boat, a shallop, up and down the canals, and how tourists had embarrassed her by snapping photographs, so that her nameless face graced photo albums around the world. How she and her family had sat in evening dress in the Piazza San

Marco, uneasy amid rows of Fascist dignitaries, as a legendary pianist gave an outdoor concert. How during the war, when she was married but living with her parents, she had ridden down the Grand Canal under a full moon, in the family gondola, to give birth to her eldest son at the hospital in the Rialto.

These fragments were all I knew of her, and sometimes I would glance at her wedding picture, where she stood, heavy-jawed and clear-eyed in a cascade of lace, beside a husband whose rakish conceit was already outlined below his brilliantined hair. I got the sense that there was some brutality there, some sexual affliction that she had endured with the fathomless patience of her generation.

For her ninetieth birthday, the entire family gathered in the highest villa to feast on agnolotti with truffles and a Monte Bianco pudding the size of a washtub, glittering with gems of crystallized fruit. Her sons announced that they had planned a luxurious trip to Venice for her, but later I found out that she'd refused it.

Soon after that, she was gone. A bad influenza; a tumor; failing kidneys. We came back from a short vacation and found her dehydrated and confused, and then began a long sunny spring of dying. The usual story: clinics, specialists, nurses, brief rallies, false hopes. Her three sons, businessmen used to bullying their environment into submission, railed at her and at fate, urged, prayed, commanded, cajoled her to stay alive. With their own hands, they cooked for her, puréed fish flown in fresh from the Adriatic, and poked spoonfuls between her reluctant lips, poured her glasses of red wine "to build blood." It would have been interesting to chart the strangled, desperate affection in the rapport of these three sons with their dying mother, but I was busy with my own feelings.

You see, I had fallen in love with Ombretta. Did she know? I didn't, myself, until the last three weeks of her life, when I was drawn to her side again and again, bringing flowers, little treats, as if in a shy courtship. It was like a childhood crush, where one finds excuses to bicycle past the house of the loved one, to use his name in conversation. For a brief while, I loved her against my own inclination—hopelessly, the way you do when someone is remote or already taken.

In the afternoons, I'd walk up the hill to find her propped in a sunny corner of the garden, awake, but ignoring her cultured lady companion, who, on orders from the three sons, would be reading aloud her favorite poems from Quasimodo or glum Leopardi: "*Così tra questa immensità s'annega il pensier mio; e il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare.*" Skeletal, almost transparent, Ombretta would bare her wolfish teeth in a polite salute and murmur my name, her blue eyes now muddy and vague, hidden behind huge, rather vulgar sunglasses, her once tough skin as papery as onion peel, her hair no longer a strict white helmet but blowing in milkweed wisps over a maculate bare skull. In the light April wind, I'd drink tea and watch her force down a few sugary sips. I'd question her companion in the usual worried undertone, and chat with Ombretta in a manner that I could not cleanse of false brightness.

On those afternoons, I was affectionate in a way that, before, I had never dared to be: holding her gnarled, discolored hand, careful not to disturb her arms, which were purple with I.V. bruises; sneaking a caress at arrival and departure, as a crafty suitor does with a distracted maiden. I could see that her heart was elsewhere. Even to me, it was shocking how, step by deliberate step, she was moving away from daylight, complicit in her own seduction by death. It was clear that she was lingering with us out of sheer politeness.

In her last week, she became clairvoyant, predicting with serene indifference the arrival of unexpected visitors, and even what color they would be wearing. Once, she remarked to me that, as a girl, she'd loved to waltz but that her husband had disliked dancing. She said this with a faint, scornful smile, as if soon she'd be waltzing as much as she liked.

On the last full day of her life, I carried her a rose from my own garden, and she awoke from her stupor long enough to hold it to her face and murmur, "I know this scent—*cuisse de nymphe*." The nurse told me that it was the only thing she'd said all day. Later, when I was leaving, she spoke again, her eyes still closed: "Please excuse my rudeness in not rising to say goodbye."

She died before dawn the next day, and that evening we came to her house for the recitation of the Rosary. There I observed a discreet storm brewing over the

silver lily, which one daughter-in-law had already appropriated, and another, in a furious whisper, maintained was hers. I forgot the dark comedy of all this when I saw the old woman laid out on her bed, and found that someone had tucked between her hands my *cuisse de nymphe* rose, wilted but still fragrant.

These trifles weren't mentioned, of course, in the grand Napoleonic church, scene of the family's weddings and funerals—a church where kings had prayed, and which was one of the many rumored hiding places of the Holy Grail. For Ombretta, who was without friends, it was filled with her sons' friends and clients, and distant relations. The bishop—a famous anti-drug crusader, clearly bored with this mild soul—stood between marble pillars and spoke of a virtuous Catholic woman who had lived out her years, a figure who could have been one of an identical series in a shooting gallery. Her sons, anguished, mourned their mother as a lost part of themselves and as a centerpiece of that great architectural structure their family, but no one seemed to think the world a duller place for her absence.

Nor did anyone allude to the curious distance that Ombretta had kept between herself and the rest of the world, a seclusion that was never selfish or hostile but seemed to confer an odd sort of grace on her surroundings. And certainly no one invoked the image, the little shadow, of a young girl flying down the canals of Venice under the sail of her own small boat. An irreverent granddaughter—a teen-age troublemaker, inappropriately dressed in trousers that revealed the top of her plump backside—had tucked a bunch of lavender into her shoulder bag, and through the congregation the fresh scent flowed out like water.

II

The last flowers Ombretta saw were likely the ones that Francescon, long ago, had painted on the beams of her ceiling. I recall a dim arabesque trail of wisteria in an Art Nouveau style, in keeping with the cottage, which was a nineteenth-century addition to the big villa. A beautiful and unrepeatable design, since Francescon's restless obsession was the creation of a new Arcadia, paradise inside a room.

Whenever I heard his loud, nasal voice

THE VIRGIN KING

They know so much more, and so much less,
“innocent details” and other. It was time to
put up or shut up. Claymation is so over,
the king thought. The watercolor virus
sidetracked tens.

Something tells me you'll be reading this on a train
stumbling through rural Georgia, wiping sleep
from your eyes as the conductor passes through
carrying a bun. We're moving today,
today on the couch.

—John Ashbery

on the phone, my heart sank. And yet I could look up at my own ceiling and adore him. There in a rococo wilderness of interlaced garlands and hovering putti I'd see his lighthearted practical genius, and I'd forgive him everything: his interminable phone calls, scheduled on an astral calendar to arrive at the worst moments; his lunatic right-wing rants, in which he cursed socialists and vaunted his own pure Piedmontese Celtic blood; the quivering glee that animated his six-foot-tall, white-haired figure at the sight of any pretty woman, and inspired his long-fingered, powerful hands to squeeze waists and wander over bottoms.

Francescon decorated walls and ceilings in our family's houses, and in churches, villas, and castles all over the province. His designs, sketched on sheaves of crumbling onionskin, came from his father, and generations of grandfathers reaching back to the eighteenth century. His was a clan of itinerant painters, famous in northern Italy and southeastern France for their trompe-l'oeil, their chinoiserie, their Baroque whirligigs, their seraphim with sensual faces. Footloose, they had set up temporary workshops in the households of the hermetic Piedmontese nobility, the frivolous members of the Savoy court, and the ambitious early industrialists. In these settings, they'd picked up the social ease of all artists and master craftsmen in fine establishments, and, being tall, handsome blond men, left behind a few bastards.

When I met Francescon, he was already in his seventies, with bright, guileless gray eyes and a drinker's nose, unmarried because of his impossible character. I don't

recall being introduced to him; one day, he simply appeared at the top of a ladder in the middle of my sheeted dining room, chattering and smoking as he daubed from a square cardboard palette, sprinkling cigarette ash and infinitesimal drops of paint through the air. It was as if he had always been there, and I immediately felt an encumbering sense of fondness for him.

We made up designs together, bickering, like kids planning a party. I'd ask for faces, for pomegranates, for cockleshells. And he'd rustle through greasy, tattered folders of drawings, shouting suggestions that were really ultimatums, refusing to combine elements from different centuries. Then for weeks he'd invade our house with his huge, disruptive passion for his work, crowding everything else into corners. My husband complained about how much he charged, how he gobbled agnolotti at the lunch we were obliged to provide for him and drank whole bottles of Barbera. I couldn't write when he was in the house. He talked constantly, or sang Bruno Lauzi songs in a deafening tenor, and if he had a new idea he'd invade my study to tell me about it. Once, hollering about sprays of olive leaves, he even burst into the bathroom where I was reading the newspaper on the toilet. When he finished a room, I'd vow never to hire him again. But six months later he'd be back.

He spent a lot of time under my roof, yet I knew little about him. I knew that he drove a battered red Fiat Uno, and lived—like a great chef who eats nothing but boiled eggs—in a nondescript modern apartment in a village in Montferrat.

I knew that his exuberant lechery had devolved into a penchant for roadside prostitutes; that he had a disapproving sister, and nephews with no interest in his craft; that although he'd had various apprentices, there was no heir interested in devoting a life to such irregular work, to the endless minutiae of mixing colors, the long hours of painting that had frozen his hands into yellowish claws, which later required a series of painful operations.

I knew that he hadn't a trace of personal vanity but was shamelessly proud of his work, of which he spoke in a doting tone as if discussing an adored young daughter: “È un amore. That wall, I have to say, it's a love.” And often he called me from houses, castles, churches, where he was finishing projects, shouting, “You have to come and see this ceiling, this façade—it's sweetness itself!”

One afternoon, he drove me and a friend into the hinterlands of Vercelli to visit two villas. One was dark and nineteenth century, with a vulgar pine kitchen and an evil atmosphere; he had lined the upper walls with a black-and-white Liberty frieze that seemed to comment on the sombreness of the house, to expand it into a sinister nobility. The other place, a huge country pile built by a long-dead Savoy courtier near a decayed resort town, was one of the loveliest I have ever seen—each room with coffered ceilings decorated by Francescon with dense eighteenth-century millefleur designs, dusted faintly with gilt. The effect was that of an Arabian Nights palace, transported to the back hills of Piedmont.

There was, in our town, a little group of women who, like me, felt an exasperated affection for Francescon. My beautiful red-haired friend was one of them. She had an old villa, a former monastery, for which he had invented a roseate shade of stucco that looked as if it had always been there. That was the thing about Francescon: nothing superfluous or vulgar ever came from his brush, and every house he touched seemed to exhale its true spirit. When an art house published a book on Francescon's work, his admirers were pleased, but I'm afraid we mostly thought of it as a vanity project. My red-haired friend and I went to the presentation in the brick town hall of his village, and as Francescon stood beside

the mayor, giving one of his rambling, faintly profane monologues, we nudged each other like proud mothers at a kindergarten fête.

That summer, he left Italy for the first time to visit America, and my friend escorted him around the East Coast. She described how he let out a whoop and clapped his hands like a child when he first saw the Chrysler Building; how he gave a talk to a roomful of old gentlemen at a club in Boston, waving his hands around and speaking an Italian that was half Piedmontese dialect while the baffled patricians nodded politely. How at her summer house she discovered him, awake with jet lag at 3 A.M., cheerfully painting her kitchen walls with a delicate Victorian border.

Time passed, and I got busier, and Francescon's phone calls became less welcome than ever. I was forever telling him that I was on my way out, promising to visit the houses he was painting, to schedule the great project we had discussed: a library ceiling in the naïve Piedmontese chinoiserie

style. A new note in his voice hinted to me that he wasn't well, but I told myself that it was just the usual problem with his hands.

Finally, the summer after Ombretta died, I heard that Francescon had been very sick: something to do with his pancreas—no one used the word "cancer." I was alarmed into inviting him to my house as a guest, something I'd never done before. I also invited a few people who knew him, including my red-haired friend, and served polenta and stew, a menu, I reasoned, that would allow Francescon to be at his ease. He shocked us all with his emaciated appearance, suddenly seeming much taller, his sweater tucked into his belt, his gray eyes blazing in a gaunt face that had acquired an extraordinary nobility. He looked, I thought, like an old prince masquerading as a homeless man.

I was dismayed by how he—a former Rabelaisian drinker and polisher of lunch plates—could manage only two glasses of wine and a few spoonfuls of polenta. Yet he seemed deliriously happy

with his party. He roared with laughter, lapsing into dialect as he raced off into one after another of his crazy anecdotes, which culminated in an encounter with a flying saucer in the wilds of Montferret. It surprised me how good a time we had: everyone stayed late, and it was hard to get Francescon to leave at the end. Standing in my dark garden, enduring his bearish, wine-scented hug, I felt something on my cheek and realized that he was crying. "*Sai che ti voglio bene, che voglio bene a tutti voi!*" he said. He loved me, he loved us all—a declaration I'd often indulgently accepted, while dodging his wandering hands.

After I saw him off, I was seized by a sudden apprehension. He'd insisted that his doctor had issued him a clean bill of health, but his departure that night left me with an irrevocable chill that I had come to recognize as that of finality. As I watched his tail-lights vanish down the hill, I thought of him driving home along the ugly provincial highway, past the draggled rural prostitutes he knew so well, stepping over the threshold of his tiny apartment, where no one waited for him, while I would sleep wreathed in the roses he'd lavished on my bedroom. And I felt shamed by the paucity of the celebration I had offered him, that night and always, by the meanness of not having, just once, spoken to him from the heart.

The next—and last—time I saw Francescon was a few weeks later. He was as yellow as beeswax, intubated, weighted with morphine, and breathing with deep mechanical yelps, as he lay on a bed in a country hospital near Lanzo, full of hideous turquoise tile. Through the windows, against a clear autumn sky, I could see the Aosta mountains, arid and brown. No one was with him when my red-haired friend and I entered the hospital room. Around the next bed, a large family was gathered, chattering loudly as they took turns spooning broth into the mouth of an old man with amputated legs. They stared unsmiling at us as we bent over Francescon and spoke his name.

"I think he knows we're here," my friend whispered, and, for an instant, his gray eyes flashed open: startling, almost silver windows in his jaundiced face. A slight smile crossed his lips. Then the eyes closed. His legs moved the sheet, reveal-



"Now we just have to sit back and wait for the Fed to bail us out."

ing a catheter and an embarrassing smooth stretch of lower belly, and after we covered him he didn't respond again. Under the scrutiny of the clan at the next bed, we each gave him a kiss on the cheek, feeling awkward. In effect, what were we to Francescon? Not family; not sweethearts. And as we walked away down the ugly tile hallways I wondered whether he'd really recognized us, or whether the haze of morphine had transformed our faces into the idealized feminine features of the dryads, the seraphim, the stoop-shouldered chinoiserie beauties he had painted again and again.

His funeral was held in his village, in a seventeenth-century church built for a poor rural congregation: a brick edifice enriched with no marble or gilt. It was clear that neither Francescon nor his ancestors had been at work here. My friend and I were the only people present from the dead man's circle of well-heeled clients. Around us was a modest crowd of thirty or forty, with the dark winter clothes and the weather-beaten faces of hill and mountain people. No tears were shed during the impersonal service, in which a plump, waxen-faced priest prayed for the soul of our dear friend and neighbor and did not once mention his art.

It occurred to me that the crowd and the church were like the crumbling shells of chestnuts you find in the woods. If you scrape the dirt away, you find, like a jewel, the fiery brown nut glistening within. The cheap varnished coffin that held Francescon's long body was the color of fresh chestnuts, and, when his sour-faced brother-in-law and five other men picked up the coffin and carried it down the street to the cemetery at the edge of town, I felt as if they were burying something precious in the mud.

A year later, I was in Rome visiting the atelier of a legendary fashion designer and aesthete. On his desk I saw a copy of Francescon's book. When I told the designer that I had known the painter and had his work throughout my house, he raised a seignorial eyebrow and said that I was a lucky person, because the book was a treasure and Francescon a great maestro. And in my heart I felt a familiar tug of shame.

Nowadays, there is a resonant absence in the afternoons, with no one to annoy me with phone calls. In the painted rooms

around me, I can count the designs: the pomegranates; the scallop shells and putti; my bedroom garden, real enough to fool the occasional errant bee; the four winds puffing overhead in our entranceway, the curling Baroque borders on all our slanted country doors. One of the doors is unfinished, with the design still traced out in pencil, marking the moment when my husband got sick of Francescon's endless presence and suspended the work.

Occasionally, driving down a country road, I look at the old villas behind their garden walls and think of all the works in progress that Francescon begged me to come and see. In one house, he told me, he had created a net of roses carried by birds hurling themselves up toward a Watteau sky, billowing with foliage and clouds. Now, like the gates of paradise, those doors are closed to me.

III

The day Nonna Ombretta died, I saw Remo, weeping furiously, walk out of her garden and onto the dusty road, rutted by the tractors and pickup trucks he drove daily to the woodshed and outbuildings. His shoulders were shaking in the cheap suit jacket he had put on to join the family kneeling at prayer in her sitting room. When I ran up to him and put a comforting hand on his arm, I smelled his alcoholic breath and felt the abandoned force of his grief, mingled with the electrical charge of the physical attraction he exerted on every woman he met.

In his long years of working for my Italian family, Remo was described variously as a *domestico*, an *uomo tuttofare*, and a factotum. He was a superior hired hand of protean talents, whose energy and ingenuity were the soul of the three villas.

I first encountered Remo shortly after my wedding. At a summer dinner party, in the high-ceilinged rooms of my brother-in-law's house, open to the stuffy Malaspina night, women in provincial evening finery began shrieking and covering their hair as a tiny, blundering baby bat wobbled desperately through the lamplight, finally coming to rest at the top of a voluminous curtain.

"Kill it! Hit it with a broom!" the blood-thirsty female guests shrilled, directing their cries to Remo, who until then had been parking cars, tending a gargantuan buffet of grilled meats, and getting drunk

with the waiters hired for the evening. I saw a small, slight man with shaggy dark hair dart into the room, carrying a push broom and a ladder under one arm with no discernible strain. As he opened the ladder near the curtain where the bat clung, I grabbed his rolled-up sleeve and said to him in a low voice, "Please don't kill it!"

He looked at me—he was no taller than I was—and I realized what a curious face he had, with a pointed chin and slanted high cheekbones like a cat, and something of a cat's complacency in the set of his jaw. It was impossible to guess how old he was, since although his face was pockmarked and seamed by the weather, his narrow black eyes were filled with an impudent glee that gave him the look of a feral boy: an Italian Mowgli, perhaps.

As our eyes met, he lowered his gaze respectfully, like an old-fashioned servant. At the same time, I felt him considering me in my low-cut evening dress, and experienced the sudden shock of the magnetism that women, old and young, giggled over whenever Remo's name came up. I noticed that his wrists and the chest visible above his modestly buttoned collar were covered with a mat of fine black hair.

"Don't worry, Signora!" he said, and his voice was not deep or compelling, as I might have imagined, but light and raspy, like that of an adolescent.

In the midst of the hubbub, he laid aside the broom and in a flash was up the ladder and down again, motioning to me to follow him outside to the terrace, where he opened his clasped hands. Cupped there was a walnut-size wrinkled sphere the color of licorice, from which a small, tender, demonic black face looked blankly at us.

I drew a breath, as Remo tossed the bat lightly into the air like a ball of tissue paper that suddenly sprouted wings and faded into the hot darkness. "*Ecco!*" he said softly, and ever after I felt as if we shared a secret.

Remo resided in a two-room annex to Ombretta's cottage. He had a mysterious bond with the old lady, and served her in every way—driving, running errands, tending her roses and lavender—with slavish devotion. For her part, she treated him with chiding tenderness, like a fourth child, another rascal of a son. Beyond this, his *tuttofare* days at the three

villas encompassed every kind of task: plastering, carpentry, pruning orchards, sweeping chimneys, repairing machinery, cleaning out deadwood in the acres of forest attached to the family land. A skilled blacksmith, he forged tall wrought-iron canopy beds for each of the three brothers and their wives. And in the old brick outdoor bread oven he cooked the best pizzas that anyone had ever tasted, a mainstay of family communions and birthdays.

Children adored him, and he had an almost telepathic connection with animals. He fed and nursed a ragged collection of stray cats and dogs, fallen nestlings, and even a spindly fox cub. His animals wandered and fought among the dismantled motors in his tiny courtyard and earned curses from his wife.

Yes, Remo had a wife: beaten-down, prematurely toothless, with the bitter, suspicious look in her eyes peculiar to the wives of philanderers, a silent black-haired woman who could have been his sister, and was probably a cousin from the tiny village in the back hills of Cuneo, where he was born. Though his family had been rooted in the Italian-French borderland for generations, Remo bore no resemblance to the classic blond or red-haired Celt who claims—like Francescon, and his right-wing regionalist friends—to be the authentic face of the *terroir*. Remo looked more like a dweller of the inland fastnesses of Basilicata: one of the dark original people who grow out of the very stones of the Italian peninsula, and have a curious cognizance of the natural world.

"Remo is sort of the great god Pan, isn't he?" my bookworm daughter remarked once, after he had driven his battered Datsun truck to our house, and nonchalantly risen into the frail top branches of a huge persimmon tree to rescue our cat, trapped there for three days of an autumn gale. The cat, soaked and weak, had fled from a fireman on a ladder but lay serenely purring on Remo's shoulder, as he climbed down with one hand.

Some people, especially priests and cuckolded husbands and jealous women, thought of Remo as the devil, or at least a minor demon. At the same time, he was like a manservant out of opera buffa, with his fixed idea of the social hierarchy, his fierce loyalty to our family, his strange unholy innocence, his endless ingenuity, his well-publicized foibles: drunk every night, seducer of every pretty cleaning girl and

barmaid he came across, and even, as the gossip had it, of some Lady Chatterleys with big houses on the hill. I could well believe this, since I myself felt embarrassingly attracted by his slight, wiry body; by his polite compliments that were never disrespectful but let me know that, at any time of my choosing, things between us could take a fresh turn. When his wife finally divorced him, she cited infidelities with ten or twelve other women, including the senator's wife down the road. Remo's life outside his work was a patchwork of scandals, fights with rivals, drunken sprees, and constant complaints from my husband and his brothers, yet no one considered firing him; it would have been like cutting off your right hand.

Years passed, and one Christmas I noticed that Remo's hair was dusted with ashen gray, that the skin on his cheeks was like fissured clay, that he smelled of alcohol even in the mornings, that a shattering cough seized him each time he lit a cigarette, and that his legs in his worn jeans were bent and fleshless like those of an old rodeo rider.

But he still hauled logs with tractors, climbed into treetops to trim the highest branches, and drank all night with the Gypsy mechanics at the Bianchi garage. He now lived with a Romanian woman who worked as a barmaid in town, a hard-drinking, fleshy beauty with a witch's green eyes and a razor tongue that grew sharper as he continued his philandering. And he had a protégé, a tow-headed Albanian kid, to whom he taught everything from smithing to making pizzas, and of whom he said, with a grin, "He'll carry on when I'm gone."

Remo was only fifty then, and it didn't appear as though he had his mind set on being gone, yet after Ombretta's funeral—at which he'd helped out with stoic practicality—something in him seemed broken. He began to lose control, to vanish into alcoholic binges, to damage cars and motorbikes, and fall off ladders.

Summer came, and my husband, chil-

dren, and I departed for America, leaving our house in Remo's hands. He had instructions to paint the dozens of peeling shutters. When we came home in September, we found the shutters half painted, the wine cellar depleted, and a novel situation: Remo in love. The object of his adoration was a very young Ecuadorian woman who worked as a housekeeper nearby, and whom I'd hired to do some extra cleaning. Plump and brown-skinned, with surprised-looking pencilled eyebrows and a nose stud, the girl wandered through our house with a dazed expression that I recognized as the residue of passionate lovemaking. This seemed different from Remo's other affairs: he declared to anyone who would listen that she was the woman of his dreams, and even came to thank me, with odd formality, for having introduced the two of them.

The great problem now was his former paramour, the violent-tempered Romanian, who'd moved out but was threatening to cut her rival's throat. As if following a telenovela, we inhabitants of the three villas traded daily reports on the fierce tug-of-war for Remo's affections. I myself received hysterical phone calls from both women, and I helplessly suggested what no one could do: be patient; be reasonable; reflect.

Things did seem calmer for a time. Then, early one October morning—when Francescon was in the hospital and Ombretta was five months dead—the phone rang and my brother-in-law announced, in a shaking voice, that Remo had hanged himself in the woodshed.

The carabinieri, and everyone else, had explanations. Some said that it was the madness of love or an alcoholic raptus; some that any autopsy would show what Remo had been hiding—that he was a dying man, his lungs as invaded by cancer as his heart had been by his last romantic folly. No autopsy was performed, though: the forces of law and order cared little about the fate of a drunken *uomo tuttofare*.

What we knew about his last night was that he had started out drinking with his Albanian protégé in the seedy *birreria* he frequented on Corso Mantova, and that as usual they had finished up in the woodshed, sharing a bottle of grappa, sitting on crates near the mountains of firewood



they'd cut and stacked for the villas. They talked about Remo's love problem, and the Albanian kid said later that Remo was in dire spirits: convinced that his sweetheart, in the face of death threats and harassment, was beginning to cool toward him.

Later, he trudged up the hill to his house and wrote a letter to his girl, a letter that never reached her, since the carabinieri promptly impounded it as evidence, and launched it into their labyrinthine bureaucracy. Just before dawn, Remo must have made his way down the hill to the woodshed again.

Poor, hasty, paltry funeral, held in the San Giuseppe parish church, a concrete sixties building the color of a grimy biscuit. The priest, who had always detested Remo, accepted a large donation to the youth football fund as incentive to ignore his suicide and to say a few perfunctory words over the coffin that our family paid for and decorated with autumn flowers from the three villas. In the front pew, toothless and avid, sat Remo's ex-wife, who had already descended on his house with a pack of relatives from Cuneo and cleared out anything of value. The vindictive Romanian was conspicuously absent. The rest of the mourners were a sparse mixture of our family and Remo's drinking friends: housepainters, a local plumber and electrician, the Gypsy mechanics, the Albanian kid, his pimply face raw with grief.

And there was the Ecuadoran girl. She'd come with me, wearing a cheap black veil, and sat sobbing like a child, muttering in Spanish, as people stared. I patted her chubby arm, and imagined their enchanted affair, which must have made her feel like the most beautiful woman in the world. Remo had told her things she had never heard from any man. He'd given her champagne—ours—and bought her a ring that looked like gold.

As the priest droned on, I thought how little his words had to do with the pagan Remo, who had lived and made love and died as he pleased. His small body should have been buried in the forest, left to the brisk work of the scavengers he knew so well. I recalled the last conversation we'd had, which was not about roof repair or pruning fruit trees, or even about his romantic drama. It was about a young wild boar that Remo had accidentally hit on a backwoods road with his truck. He

told me that it was crying with pain in a way that sounded like a human child. So he picked it up, as only he would have done, and quieted it in his arms until it died.

And then? "Then I took it home and gutted it. Young like that, they make good eating."

This eerie tenderness and brutal practicality were, I thought, at the heart of Remo's character. It was not hard to imagine his last moments, to picture the final gulp of grappa, the expert, if intoxicated, knotting of the noose, the nimble step atop the crate where he had sat earlier, drinking with his friend. Then the pause, the pre-dawn chill of the wooded hillside, the damp, clay-scented air, the awareness of the nearby forest and the glistening eyes of hundreds of beasts going dispassionately about their nocturnal rounds; then the step forward, perhaps muttering the name of the girl; the swift grip of the rope; the sudden wing of true blackness sweeping over the dark.

These are the three who are not present anymore. All of them sent out of the world with words unworthy of them, eulogies that revealed only a deep ignorance of who they really were. Of their status as celebrities in—what galaxy? Mine, certainly. I'm sure, at least, that I am the only one who noticed their peculiar constellation, though I have yet to discern the pattern they form.

The gods of antiquity tossed saints and sinners, lovers and chimeras up into the heavens, making sure that there was a thumping good yarn behind each stellar formation. Just so, I'm certain that a kind of logic connects these three characters, and I begin to suspect that I am more implicated in it than I thought. Perhaps I was not just a witness but one of them, a fourth outsider at our villas: I, the foreign writer; Ombretta, the Venetian recluse; Francescon, the master painter; Remo, the wild spirit. Perhaps we were a story, and didn't know it.

I'm still searching for the thread, aided by a few clues in my own house. An iron bed, and the melancholy voice of an Ecuadoran girl who calls me occasionally, asking for news of a letter; the fat-cheeked face of a putto, peering out of a garland of dog roses; and a few ribbon-bound sachets of lavender, crumbling into aromatic dust. ♦

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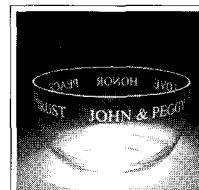
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Lionel Trilling and his discontents.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Lionel Trilling was not completely happy about being Lionel Trilling. "I have one of the great reputations in the academic world," he wrote in his journal after being promoted to full professor in the Columbia English Department, in 1948. "This thought makes me retch." Two years later, he published *"The Liberal Imagination,"* a book that sold more than seventy thousand copies in hardcover and more than a hundred thousand in paperback, and that made Trilling a figure, a model of the intellectual in Cold War America. He represented, for many people, the life of the mind. Trilling was baffled by the attention. "I hear on all sides of the extent of my reputation—which some even call 'fame,'" he wrote in the journal. "It is the thing I have most wanted from childhood—although of course in much greater degree—and now that I seem to have it I have no understanding whatever of its basis—of what it is that makes people respond to what I say, for I think of it as of a simplicity and of a naivety almost extreme."

He hated being regarded as a paragon of anything. In 1955, he complained to his analyst about "the effect on my emotional and sexual life of my sense of my prestige" and "my feeling of disgust with my public 'noble' character." He became a University Professor at Columbia, but he did not consider himself a scholar: he had no languages except English and he didn't see the point of the systematic study of literature. He did not consider himself a critic, either, and was surprised when he heard himself referred to as one. His ambition

was to be a great novelist; he regarded his criticism as "an afterthought." He disliked Columbia; he disliked most of his colleagues; he disliked teaching graduate students—in 1952, after a routine disagreement over the merits of a dissertation, he refused to teach in the graduate school again. He was depressive, he had writer's block, and he drank too much. He did not even like his first name. He wished that he had been called John or Jack.

But although he may not have wanted what he had, and he may not have understood entirely why he had it, he appreciated its value and tended it with care. This meant cultivating a discreet distance from any group with which he might be too quickly identified—professors, public intellectuals, liberals, Jews. He was all of those things, of course; he would never have denied it. But he resented being understood under the aspect of anything so insufficiently nuanced as a category. Around the time *"The Liberal Imagination"* was published, he gave an enthusiastically received lecture at Princeton. He registered his reaction in the journal:

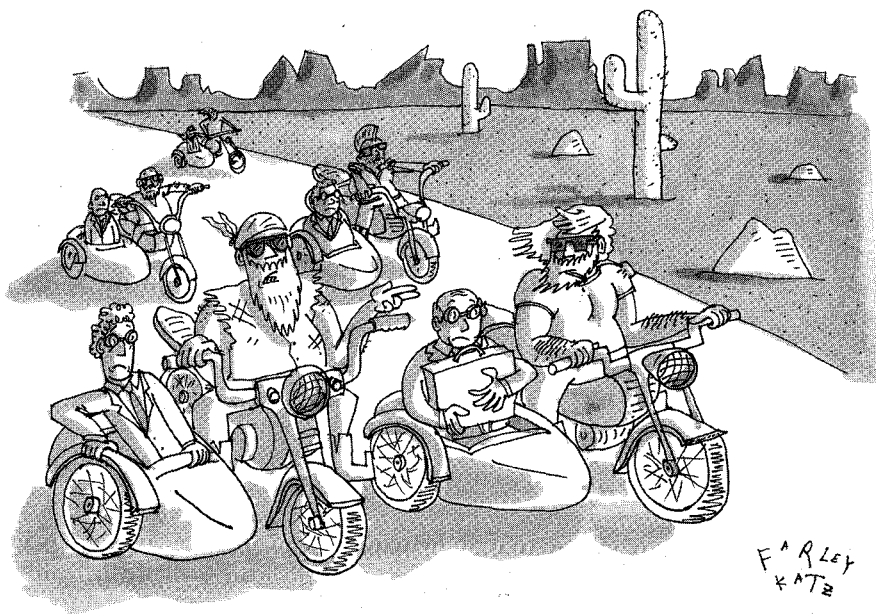
Feeling of total alienation from the academic profession and that I must not any more identify myself with it at such occasions. But I must in all things declare myself and go on being "brilliant," and wrong if necessary, extreme. The sense that I fall between the two categories, of the academic and the man of genius & real originality, but better to make a full attempt toward "genius."—To learn to make no concessions of a personal social kind toward the academic, but also not to signalize in a personal way my separation from it.

He wanted to feel superior without betraying to others his sense of superior-

After he published "The Liberal Imagination,"



ne to represent for many Americans the life of the mind. Photograph



"Things have been going much more smoothly since we started riding with representation."

ity. A lot of psychic energy went into the care and maintenance of this persona. It was the price he paid for a small but subtle and distinctive body of criticism.

Trilling was forty-four when *"The Liberal Imagination"* came out, and he had already acquired a mystique among literary intellectuals. "With the deep-sunk colored pouches under his eyes, the cigarette always in hand like an intellectual gesture, an air that combined weariness, vanity, and immense caution, he was already a personage," Alfred Kazin wrote about meeting Trilling for the first time, in 1942. "He seemed intent on not diminishing his career by a single word." Trilling's doctoral dissertation, on Matthew Arnold, had been published in 1939 and reviewed with approval by Edmund Wilson and Robert Penn Warren. His study of E. M. Forster, in 1943, was the occasion for a seven-page article in *Time*. A novel, *"The Middle of the Journey,"* appeared in 1947; it had a less happy reception and disappointing sales, but it was widely noticed. Trilling had taught at Columbia since 1932; he was a regular contributor to the *Times* and *The New Yorker*. Still, *"The Liberal Imagination"* was a phenomenon. It did something that very few

books have ever done: it made literary criticism matter to people who were not literary critics.

"The Liberal Imagination" was a Cold War book. It appeared at the same political moment as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *"The Vital Center"* (1949), George Orwell's *"1984"* (1949), and Richard Crossman's *"The God That Failed"* (1950)—books that helped make the case for liberal anti-Communism. Trilling was certainly a liberal anti-Communist. Orwell was one of his heroes: he reviewed *"1984"* in *The New Yorker*, and called the book "momentous." And he was prominently associated with *Partisan Review*, which had been the journalistic home of the anti-Communist left since 1937. Five of the sixteen essays in *"The Liberal Imagination"* first appeared in *Partisan Review*; a sixth is about *Partisan Review*. (The book is being reprinted this fall by New York Review Books.)

Like many liberal anti-Communists in the nineteen-forties, Trilling had once been a fellow-traveller. At the time he wrote the essays in *"The Liberal Imagination,"* his politics were, as he put it, "ultimately" leftist—meaning that his progressivism was tempered by pessimism about the limits of political action—and he always acknowledged the importance of Marx to his thought. But he despised

the advocates of a dictatorship of virtue. "I live with a deep fear of Stalinism at my heart," he wrote to the theatre critic, and his future Columbia colleague, Eric Bentley in March, 1946—before the Truman Doctrine, before the Berlin blockade, before the Hiss case. "I think of my intellectual life as a struggle, not energetic enough, against all the blindnesses and malign obfuscations of the Stalinoid mind of our time."

Bentley wrote back with the thought that an uncompromising anti-Stalinism might risk replicating the intolerance of an uncompromising Stalinism. Trilling declined to split the difference. "I am sure that Stalinism is corrupt and dangerous," he replied.

What revolts and disgusts me . . . is the hideous involvement of ideals, feelings, social indignations, exhibitions of martyrdom, self-pity. I expect a quantum of injustice in any imperium, expect contradictions as the price of order—what brings me to the puking-point is the fine feelings. And what brings me to the fighting-point is the increasingly sure sense that Stalinist power aims at the annihilation of anything that does not contribute to power. There has never been a power-ideology that so wished to destroy every human quality that did not add to itself.

The letters to Bentley are uncharacteristically direct. There is nothing so personal or quite so belligerent in *"The Liberal Imagination."* Most people who picked up the book in 1950 would have understood it as an attack on the dogmatism and philistinism of the fellow-travelling left, but the term "liberal" is never defined in *"The Liberal Imagination."* And there are, as a matter of political theory, very different types of liberals. There is, in Isaiah Berlin's famous distinction, the liberal who believes in negative liberty, "freedom from," and the liberal who believes in positive liberty, "freedom for." There is the classical liberalism of free markets and individual rights, and the left liberalism of state planning and class solidarity. In Trilling's time, many liberal anti-Communists insisted that membership in the Communist Party was a disqualification for teaching or for joining a labor union, and many liberal anti-anti-Communists vehemently disagreed. So when, in the preface, Trilling says, "In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition," he is indicating, in the elliptical manner

that is characteristic of his prose, that he is treating all liberals alike.

In Trilling's view, the faith that liberals share, whether they are Soviet apologists, Hayekian free marketers, or subscribers to *Partisan Review*, is that human betterment is possible, that there is a straight road to health and happiness. A liberal is a person who believes that the right economic system, the right political reforms, the right undergraduate curriculum, and the right psychotherapy will do away with unfairness, snobbery, resentment, prejudice, neurosis, and tragedy. The argument of "The Liberal Imagination" is that literature teaches that life is not so simple—for unfairness, snobbery, resentment, prejudice, neurosis, and tragedy happen to be literature's particular subject matter. In Trilling's celebrated statement: "To the carrying out of the job of criticizing the liberal imagination, literature has a unique relevance . . . because literature is the human activity that takes the fullest and most precise account of variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty." This is why literary criticism has something to say about politics.

A key perception of "The Liberal Imagination" is that most human beings are not ideologues. Intellectual coherence is not a notable feature of their politics. People's political opinions may be rigid; they are not necessarily rigorous. They tend to float up out of some mixture of sentiment, custom, moral aspiration, and aesthetic pleasingness. Trilling's point was that this does not make those opinions any less potent politically. On the contrary, it's the unexamined attitudes and assumptions—things that people take to be merely matters of manners or taste, and nothing so consequential as political positions—that need critical attention. "Unless we insist that politics is imagination and mind," as Trilling put it, "we will learn that imagination and mind are politics, and of a kind we will not like."

With a few exceptions, such as his essay on Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, Trilling was not a close reader of texts. He thought that literary critics took style and aesthetics more seriously than writers themselves did. He was interested in big abstractions—mind, self, reality, will, pleasure, genius, sincerity, authenticity—and he used literature to assess the status of concepts like these in the minds of his

readers. He was made fun of for his free deployment of "we"—"We are not likely to feel this," "We are inclined to think that." It was almost a trademark. But he was speaking to people like himself, liberal, educated people who wanted to be right-thinking. Why, for example, did these people find the heroines of Jane Austen's "Mansfield Park" and Charles Dickens's "Little Dorrit" unappealing? The answer had something to do with their notion of will. Why did they respect Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson and condescend to Henry James and William Dean Howells? It had something to do with their conception of reality. Why did enjoying Kipling make them feel guilty? It had something to do with changing assumptions about loyalty and the nation. Trilling thought that people's literary preferences tell us something about their conception of what he called "the sentiment of being": about the kind of people they wish to be and about the way they wish others to be—that is, about their morality and their politics.

The book that Trilling would have had in mind when he put the essays in "The Liberal Imagination" together was Arnold's "Culture and Anarchy" (1867), also an attempt to chasten the liberalism of its day, and Trilling used "literature" in the same way that Arnold used "culture": as a generic term that actually refers to an extremely select canon. Watching over the canon is one of the critic's chief duties. He or she is a kind of health inspector, and the job is not a simple one, since a book's overt politics may be quite different from its political effects. "The contemporary authors we most wish to read and most wish to admire for their literary qualities," Trilling said, "demand of us a great agility and ingenuity in coping with their antagonism to our social and political ideals." The critic lets us know which angels are worth wrestling with.

The business of criticism is therefore a perilous one. You do not want to make a mistake; much hangs in the balance. As Trilling warned, "Dreiser and James: with

that juxtaposition we are immediately at the dark and bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet. One does not go there gladly, but nowadays it is not exactly a matter of free choice whether one does or does not go. . . . The liberal judgment of Dreiser and James goes back of politics, goes back to the cultural assumptions that make politics." The business about the dark and bloody crossroads (possibly it's the place where the ignorant armies clash?) is dramatic but obscure. No actual blood has ever been spilled in disputes over Henry James or T. S. Eliot or Robert Frost, and it is not obvious what metaphorical blood Trilling had in mind. But his disciples loved the phrase, for it assigned to criticism a mortal mission. "The Liberal Imagination" belongs to the age of (it feels a little funny just typing the words today) heroic criticism. It sent literature into battle.

Trilling was less of an anomaly than he liked to imagine. He was not the first English professor to feel alienated from his discipline, and he was certainly not the last. Anti-academicism is part of the culture of English departments. And there were plenty of congenial public intellectuals at Columbia during Trilling's years there, starting with John Dewey, who admired Trilling's book on Arnold, and Mark Van Doren, who was Trilling's teacher, and including Jacques Barzun, Meyer Schapiro, Richard Hofstadter, and Daniel Bell. But Trilling did dream of being a famous novelist. He published a number of short stories—two of them, "The Other Margaret" and "Of This Time, of That Place," were especially well regarded—and he had hopes for "The Middle of the Journey."

The context for that novel is the split over Communism among middle-class progressives in the nineteen-thirties; the setting is a Connecticut village where a group of them are spending the summer. It's a solid piece of fiction in the style of what Trilling called "moral realism"—the style of Austen, James, and Forster. Some reviewers criticized the novel for being idea-driven, but it is no more idea-driven than "A Passage to India," and a lot less than "Hard Times." Its weakness, which is a weakness in Trilling's writing generally, is its difficulty with humor. ("When I first encountered the style of Lionel Trilling," the art critic Harold



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Rosenberg once said, "I looked for the joke and discovered there wasn't any.") The dust jacket promised "a flashing comedy of manners," which is what the pastoral setting suggests—writers and professors playing at being rustics. But, as he acknowledged to Bentley, Trilling did not have an ear for comedy. "I can imagine some wonderfully gifted comic writer who sees the sadness and avoids having to say anything explicitly," he complained.

If "The Middle of the Journey" had been funny, it might have outlived its topical moment. Even as it was, the timing was unlucky. One of the main characters is based on Whittaker Chambers, whom Trilling had known when they were undergraduates at Columbia. When Trilling's novel came out, in 1947, Chambers had broken with the Communist Party and was a well-known anti-Communist, but he did not make his spectacular accusation against Alger Hiss until the late summer of 1948. By then, the novel was nearly forgotten. Trilling tried for years to persuade Viking to reprint it, but it was not republished until 1975, the year Trilling died. It proceeded to sell fifty thousand copies in six months.

Until this year, it was not generally known that Trilling worked on another, untitled novel and got about a third of the way through it. This aborted enterprise, published as "The Journey Abandoned" (Columbia; \$26.95), has been edited by Geraldine Murphy, who found the manuscript in Trilling's papers, and who provides an excellent introduction. The unfinished book is populated with more complicated characters and relationships than "The Middle of the Journey," but it's not clear where the story is headed. Notes left by Trilling indicate that he was counting on inspiration, and inspiration evidently failed.

As Murphy says, the model for the book is one of Trilling's favorite Henry James novels, "The Princess Casamassima," the subject of a famous essay in "The Liberal Imagination." Trilling took "The Princess Casamassima" to be an example of what he called the story of the Young Man from the Provinces, in which a bright but naïve young man (or woman; there are, after all, some well-known female protagonists in the tradi-

tion) decides to conquer, by sheer exertion of will, sophisticated society, to enter into the gates of power and knowledge. Some demon of circumstance hands this young person a chance, and the result is always the same. *Illusions perdues*. "The Red and the Black" belongs to this tradition; so do "Great Expectations," "Sentimental Education," and "The Portrait of a Lady."

In Trilling's novel, the naïve young man is an aspiring literary critic called Vincent; the chance he is handed is an appointment as the authorized biographer of a man who, after a worthy career as a writer and artist, has a much more distinguished career as a scientist. This improbable eminence—his name is Buxton—is still alive; sadly, soon after we're introduced to him and the circle of intellectual power brokers around him (one of whom is based on Mary McCarthy), the manuscript breaks off. Some tragic choice or temptation must lie in the hero's path, but there is no indication of what the crisis was going to be.

Unlike "The Middle of the Journey," where the prose is modulated almost to flatness, the unfinished novel has passages that are close to Jamesian pastiche:

She saw the shadow cross his face. With how many starts and stops, with what a superabundance of doubts and false imaginings and searches for hidden significances, with how many attempts to master its own inchoateness would this young mind of his move toward such an idea as her mind had just so simply conceived.

The basic trouble with the book, though, is that the character of Buxton is impossible. He was evidently intended as some sort of transcendent culture hero, wise beyond worldliness:

As the white beard wagged with the words Buxton was speaking, Buxton's eyes were involved in some other activity. Under the heavy brows, the eyes lived with the life of the contemplating mind. . . . For the eyes showed, or so Vincent felt, a life beyond the words that Buxton was speaking. And, far more than the words, it was the eyes that were giving Vincent his strange new sense of well-being.

According to Trilling's notes, Buxton was inspired partly by the nineteenth-century poet Walter Savage Landor; Murphy thinks that Trilling may have had J. Robert Oppenheimer in mind. The descriptions, though, are reminiscent of Gloriani, the supremely successful sculptor in "The Ambassadors," in whose garden Lambert Strether tells Little Bil-

ham to "Live all you can." James's description of Gloriani:

He was to recall in especial, as the penetrating radiance, as the communication of the illustrious spirit itself, the manner in which, while they stood briefly, in welcome and response, face to face, he was held by the sculptor's eyes. He was not soon to forget them, was to think of them, all unconscious, unintended, preoccupied though they were, as the source of the deepest intellectual sounding to which he had ever been exposed.

He is one of James's less plausible inventions.

The unfinished novel doesn't have much literary interest, but it does have a lot of biographical interest, because it lets us see Trilling imagining his own world—the world of ambitious young critics, resentful middle-aged professors, pompous publishers and compromised foundation heads, intellectual femmes fatales, and the megalomaniacal editors of little magazines—as a nineteenth-century novel. (In his journal, in the late nineteen-forties, Trilling notes that his friend and contemporary Irving Howe, on the basis of some critical pieces in *Partisan Review* and *The Nation*, has been offered a job at *Time*: "How right for my Vincent!") The Young Man (or Woman) from the Provinces novel is built on an irony, which is that although the world that glitters inside the gates is mostly a sham, you can lose your soul trying to get there. Something real is at stake in the pursuit of an illusion. It would have been interesting to learn how Trilling made things turn out for Vincent.

The Middle of the Journey" is the last work of fiction that Trilling published. The explanation usually given is that he was wounded by the reviews, particularly one in *Commentary*, by Robert Warshow. Warshow was a likable man, but he was a coldhearted critic, and he knew where to slip in the knife. Among many other things, he complained that none of the major characters in "The Middle of the Journey" are Jewish, even though "the middle class which experiences Stalinism was in large part a Jewish middle class." The insinuation was that Trilling was trying to conceal his own Jewishness. "Mr. Trilling might have come closer to the 'essence' of the experience," as Warshow dryly put it, "if he had been more willing to face his own relation

to it." The sting was that Trilling knew Warshow, they had the same politics, and he knew the editors at *Commentary*. He must have felt that this was family.

It was family, and so there is a backstory. *Commentary* had been founded by the American Jewish Committee two years before, in 1945. Its editor was Elliot Cohen, and Trilling was invited to join the advisory board. He declined. He didn't want to be associated with a magazine that approached issues from a self-consciously Jewish perspective, and he was suspicious of the editor's motives. "Elliot's invitation to join the contributing board of editors of his Jewish magazine—not made in good faith—impulse to 'degrade' me by involving me in a Jewish venture," he wrote in the journal. His refusal was not taken well by the editors, and Warshow's review was evidently pay-back. Soon after it appeared, Trilling had a dream in which he watched three adolescents murder a bus driver: they pat him gently on the neck while they explain that they are going to kill him. "No emotion on the part of leader or his two followers except cruel intent—my sense that I was witnessing the cruelest possible thing," Trilling described it in the journal. He associated the dream with Warshow's review; he thought that the bus driver must be Cohen.

The question that Warshow raised about Trilling's relation to his Jewishness was raised many more times after Trilling became a public figure. There were rumors that he had changed his name from Cohen, and remarks about his Anglophilia and his genteel manners. The case is not complicated. Trilling's father, David Trilling, was an immigrant from Bialystok. His mother, Fannie Cohen, was born in London; her parents were Polish and Russian immigrants. The family was middle class when Trilling was a student, but the parents suffered during the Depression and afterward, and Trilling had to help support them. Most of his early short stories and reviews were on Jewish themes, and a lot of them appeared in a magazine called *The Menorah Journal*, which he wrote for frequently between 1925 and 1931, and where he was an editorial assistant from 1929 to 1930.

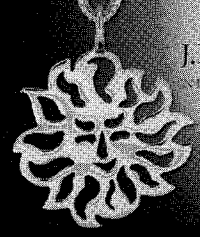
The Menorah Journal focussed, as one might expect, on subjects of interest to Jews. But when it came to "the Jewish


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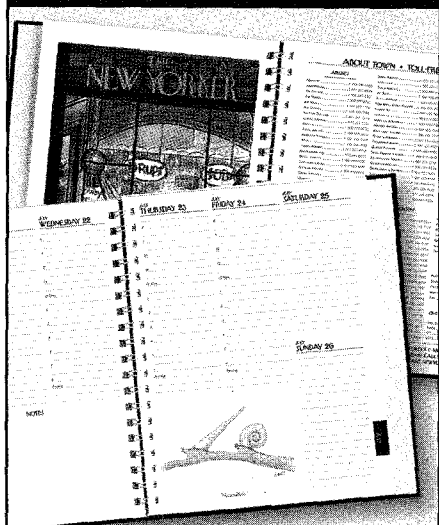
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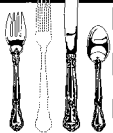
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present,” as Trilling described the editorial policy many years later, the magazine “undertook to normalize it by suggesting that it was not only as respectable as the present of any other group but also as foolish, vulgar, complicated, impossible, and promising.” The editors regarded it as a provincialism, a limitation on their intellectual freedom, to assume that there must be something called “the Jewish point of view”; the writers made fun of Jewish pieties about Jewishness without losing their feeling of solidarity as Jews.

“It is never possible for a Jew of my generation to ‘escape’ his Jewish origin,” Trilling explained, in a symposium on Jewish writers in 1944. Still, he said:

I cannot discover anything in my professional intellectual life which I can specifically trace back to my Jewish birth and rearing. I do not think of myself as a “Jewish writer.” I do not have in mind to serve by my writing any Jewish purpose. I should resent it if a critic of my work were to discover in it either faults or virtues which he called Jewish.

Around the same time, Trilling was asked to address Jewish students at Columbia. There is no innate quality of Jewishness, he told them. The culture of an American Jew is not Jewish; it’s American. Jewishness exists only because of “the belief of non-Jews that Jews constitute a racial entity and a certain kind of action on the part of non-Jews based on this belief.” Without this prejudice against the Jews, “the idea of Jewishness would largely disappear.”

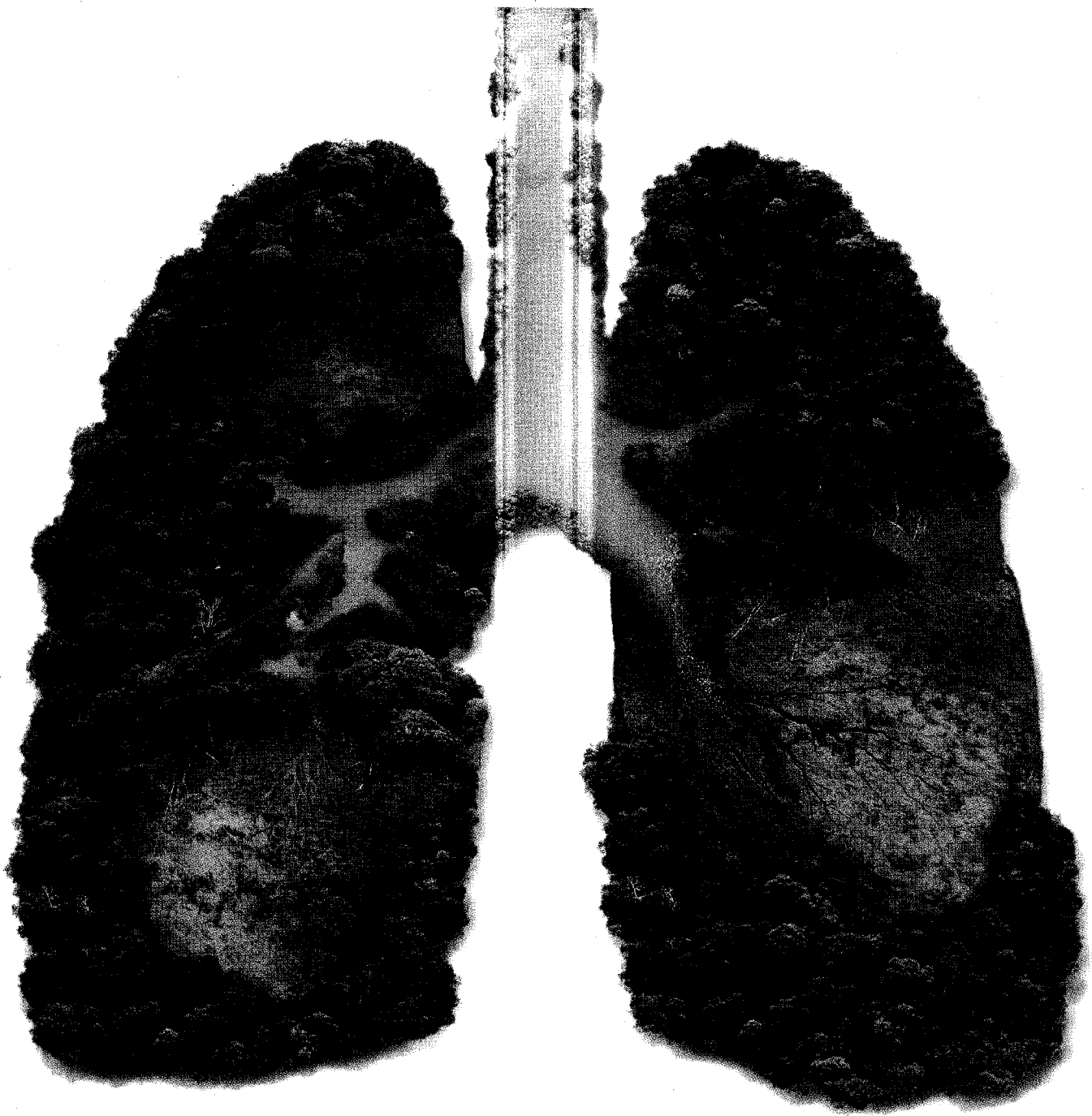
Sartre was criticized for making the same argument, a few years later, in “Anti-Semite and Jew,” but there *are* always non-Jews who have ideas about “the Jews,” and so there are, on Trilling’s theory, always good reasons for Jews to feel Jewish. Even at Columbia, Trilling was not talking in a vacuum. When he was a graduate student there, he was advised by his professors to leave the English Department on the ground that it was not a congenial place for someone who was, as they put it, “a Freudian, a Marxist, and a Jew.” He was the first Jew to become an assistant professor in the department; he was appointed by the autocratic president of the university, Nicholas Murray Butler, during the summer vacation, so that the faculty would not have to be consulted. Afterward, his former dissertation adviser,

Emery Neff, paid a visit to him and his wife, Diana, to explain that he should not understand his promotion to mean that the department would welcome any more Jews. The Trillings were not the kind of people to trim their style to suit the prejudices of people like Emery Neff. They had a mild scorn for Jews who, in their view, wallowed in Yiddishkeit, as they thought Kazin did in his memoirs; but Trilling was offended when a Jewish critic, Robert Alter, characterized his relation to Judaism as “honorable.” “What nonsense,” he wrote in his journal, toward the end of his life. “It had always—almost always—been a positive pleasure, an excitement.”

The oddest part of the *Commentary* episode is that the editor of *The Menorah Journal* when Trilling wrote for it was Elliot Cohen. Cohen had been a brilliant English major at Yale, but he had decided not to pursue an academic career because of anti-Semitism. Thus Trilling’s suspicion that Cohen was trying to “degrade” him: Trilling thought that Cohen resented his academic success. Eventually, Trilling did become a contributor to *Commentary*, and he and Warshow became good friends. After Warshow died, of a heart attack, in 1955, at the age of forty-one, Trilling wrote an introduction to his collected essays, “The Immediate Experience” (1962). He did not ask the publisher for a fee, out of friendship for Warshow.

There is in Trilling’s writing much of what Arnold called “the Hebraic”—a concern with right conduct. But you don’t have to be Jewish to love Hebraism. If there is a religious analogue to the spirit of Trilling’s criticism, it is one that he shares with most modern American thinkers: the Protestant Reformation. From his break with Communism and the Popular Front to the end, his work was about fighting the evils of institutionalized authority. The recession at his memorial service, in St. Paul’s Chapel on the Columbia campus, was Martin Luther’s great hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

Still, the reason that Trilling published no more fiction after 1947 probably had more to do with inner doubts than with mean reviews. (Mean reviews by one’s “friends” came with the



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territory in New York intellectual life. Writers in Trilling's circle were continually "breaking" with one another over matters of political or moral punctilio.) A few years after he published "The Middle of the Journey," Trilling had a conversation with Allen Ginsberg, a former student whom he had ministered to during various adventures with university, medical, and legal authorities. They talked about a novel that Jack Kerouac, who had also been a student at Columbia, was finishing. Kerouac had once been involved in a murder committed by another Columbia student, Lucien Carr: he was arrested for helping Carr conceal the murder weapon. Trilling insisted to Ginsberg that a novel by Kerouac could not be any good. "But later I saw with what bitterness I had made the prediction," he wrote in his journal, "not wanting K's book to be good because if the book of an accessory to a murder is good, how can one of mine be?—The continuing sense that wickedness—or is it my notion of courage—is essential for real creation."

If you could get Trilling on the couch in some analyst's office in the sky, this is the place you would want to take out your notebook. Trilling's ambivalence about his own success was not strategic. It was neurotic. He knew this himself: it's why he blamed his prestige for his

sexual difficulties. (His analyst suggested that, feeling guilty for being intellectually superior, Trilling might have chosen not to be superior in all things.) In 1951, Trilling made some notes on a conversation with David Riesman, who had just published "The Lonely Crowd":

The evening with David Riesman in which with absolute precision he laid his finger on my literary trouble, although he did not know it the thing that has kept me from writing—my admiration of a commitment to what I have called the fierce and charismatic writers—as he said, my greater respect for Dostoevsky than Tolstoi. He was enormously perceptive, very brilliant, on the point. . . . I could not fail to see that my impulse for the fierce and charismatic is connected with all the confused tendencies that I have been discovering in my psn [personality]—which a month ago the perception of seemed so liberating—the meaning of the sadistic ideal in its character as representative of the superego.

Trilling desired success, but he dreaded his motives for succeeding. He seems to have associated ambition with the need to dominate or humiliate other people—with "wickedness" (which is a hint about what he might have wanted to have happen in the unfinished novel). In the *Commentary* dream, he does not identify with the victim, with the bus driver; he identifies with the killers. Trilling ended his notes on the conversation with Riesman with a resolution:

"My sense that from now on I could be content to be quiet, that this was my own thing to do."

And that is what he did. He became an apostle of acquiescence, of what he called "the refusal to be great." It was a position that had always appealed to him; it's one of the things he admired about Forster. But now he seemed convinced that every social and personal pathology, from revolutionary violence to narcissism, comes from the refusal to accept that life is conditioned—by the capacities we inherit, by the circumstances we are born into, by the people whose desires conflict with ours, by death. It was an interesting turn for a man who resented any institutional claims, who found even the obligation to teach graduate students and to haggle with colleagues an intolerable constraint on his genius. "The relaxed will," as he named it, using Forster's term, did not come naturally to Trilling; it required (to be Trillingesque) a strenuous exertion of the will. Trilling put on a face of dutifulness and deference because he mistrusted his own instincts.

When Freud published "Civilization and Its Discontents," in 1930, Trilling wrote a review dismissing the book as absurd. But the magazine he wrote it for, *The New Freeman*, folded, and the review never appeared. That was when Trilling was still a Marxist. After 1950, he became infatuated with "Civilization and Its Discontents," and especially with Freud's notion of a "death drive." The death drive is one of the most fantastic creatures in the Freudian menagerie, and Trilling took the concept exactly as Freud intended it: as naming an innate, biological resistance that people have to being made better. The death drive was designed to discredit the claim, made by renegade Freudians like Wilhelm Reich and, later on, Herbert Marcuse, that the right kind of political and economic change would do away with "discontent," with neurosis. Freud's argument, Trilling wrote in his last major work, "Sincerity and Authenticity," "may be thought to stand like a lion in the path of all hopes of achieving happiness through the radical revision of social life."

In the books published after 1950—"The Opposing Self" (1955),



"Dad, this is going to be my very first vote, and I would like to go to the polls without the benefit of your considerable political wisdom."

"Beyond Culture" (1965), and the post-humous collection "The Last Decade" (1979)—Trilling extended his criticism of liberalism to almost every tendency of modern art and thought. He continued to write nominally from inside the progressive camp, as a fellow-liberal and modernist casting a cool eye on liberalism and modernism; and he produced some significant essays—on the "two cultures" debate between C. P. Snow and F. R. Leavis, on Isaac Babel, on James Joyce's letters. But he was accused of abandoning liberalism altogether. "He now feels that his urgent task is to defend not freedom but the virtues of acknowledging necessity," Joseph Frank complained in an influential review in 1956. "From a critic of the liberal imagination, then, Mr. Trilling has evolved into one of the least belligerent and most persuasive spokesmen of the conservative imagination."

Debate over the political implications of Trilling's criticism continued long after his death. Irving Kristol called Trilling one of the two major influences on his neoconservatism (the other was Leo Strauss); Diana Trilling claimed that Kristol and his wife, Gertrude Himmelfarb, were mistaken in thinking that Trilling shared their views. "I am of the firmest belief that he would never have become a neoconservative," she announced in her memoir of their marriage, "The Beginning of the Journey." "Nothing in his thought supports the sectarianism of the neoconservative movement. Everything in his thought opposes its rule by doctrine." It was possibly a just fate for a man who believed that, as Trilling once told the sociologist Richard Sennett, "between is the only honest place to be." If you wrap yourself in enough nuance, people will understand you as they see fit. Few critics have spun more nuance than Trilling.

Trilling was a writer of many drafts, and his prose shows the trouble he took with it. It reads as though it had been written by a man who worried that an imperfectly balanced sentence could create an opening, however small, through which totalitarian impulses might creep. But balancing a thought was the essence of Trilling's genius. His characteristic sentences turn on them-

selves. They can sometimes seem self-negating:

To suppose that we can think like men of another time is as much of an illusion as to suppose that we can think in a wholly different way.

The poet, it is true, is an effect of environment, but we must remember that he is no less a cause.

Perhaps only science could effectively undertake the task of freeing sexuality from science itself.

This intense conviction of the existence of the self apart from culture is, as culture well knows, its noblest and most generous achievement.

The cast of the mind that produced these sentences is not paradoxical. It's dialectical. Trilling saw everything under a double aspect: as a condition and a consequence, a trend and a backlash, a pathway to enlightenment and a dead end of self-deception. He was a humanist who believed that works of literature can speak to us across time. That was what he had been taught as an undergraduate, in a pioneering Great Books course created by an English professor named John Erskine; it is still the educational philosophy of Columbia College. But he believed it with weakening conviction; he could see all the arguments for considering humanism a vain promise. In 1970, negotiating to write a book on Thomas Mann for the Modern Masters series, he told the editor, Frank Kermode, "What I have ultimately in mind is a statement about humanism, poor dear. Must its postures seem so beside the point? Is it right that I should now be made nothing but uncomfortable by E. M. Forster?"

Trilling's anxieties were not merely theoretical. They arose from his experiences in the classroom, where he witnessed something that should not have been mysterious to a Marxist, which is that books mean different things in different periods. How can Jane Austen conceivably "speak to" late-twentieth-century American college students, for example? Isn't what Trilling once called the "hum and buzz of implication" that constituted the culture of the British Home Counties at the time of the Napoleonic Wars impossibly remote from the hum and buzz of Morningside



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Heights at the time of the Vietnam War? To take another writer important to Trilling: D. H. Lawrence's novels meant one thing when explicit discussions of sexuality were taboo; they mean something else in a sexually permissive time, when readers are likely to take them as ratifying the ideal of conscience-free sexuality. And this does not mean that Lawrence (who was certainly not a permissivist himself) has "won"; it means that one set of socially approved views about sexuality has been replaced by a different and opposite set. The dog catches up with its own tail, but it's still the same dog.

Teaching literature, therefore, involves a serious problem of translation. Trilling took up the issue in his last, unfinished essay, called "Why We Read Jane Austen," in which he compared the way a contemporary reader tries to understand Austen with the way an anthropologist tries to understand the culture of an unfamiliar tribe. For books, including the Great ones, are social products "all the way down." They do not come from some place outside the system, and they do not represent an independent alternative to the way things are. They are among the things that are, even when they belong to what Trilling called "the adversary culture"—even when they reject conventional ways of thinking and behaving. The adversarial is part of the system; it helps to hold the other parts in place. Responsible liberal people feel better adjusted for having an appreciation of art and ideas that are contemptuous of the values of responsible liberal people. It helps the world seem round.

This is the subject of Trilling's essay "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" (1961), in which he complained about the eagerness of his students "to engage in the process that we might call the socialization of the anti-social, or the acculturation of the anti-cultural, or the legitimization of the subversive":

I asked them to look into the Abyss, and, both dutifully and gladly, they have looked into the Abyss, and the Abyss has greeted them with the grave courtesy of all objects of serious study, saying: "Interesting, am I not? And *exciting*, if you consider how deep I am and what dread beasts lie at my bottom. Have it well in mind that a knowledge of me contributes materially to your being whole, or well-rounded, men."

He was watching the dog catch up to its tail.

"On the Teaching of Modern Literature" is the first essay in "Beyond Culture." Trilling once intended to call that book "Essays For and Against Literature." He explained to his editor that he wanted to challenge the assumption that art and literature must be liberating. To his own surprise, he wrote in the preface, he had come to believe "that art does not always tell the truth or the best kind of truth and does not always point out the right way, that it can even generate falsehood and habituate us to it, and that, on frequent occasions, it might well be subject, in the interests of autonomy, to the scrutiny of the rational intellect." But, as he conceded, "the rational intellect" might be regarded as a social product, too, equally in the service of the enemies of autonomy. Humanism might be a false friend. This willingness to follow out the logic of his own premises, to register doubts about a faith for which he is still celebrated by people who are offended by attempts to understand books as fully and complexly implicated in their historical times, is the finest thing about his work.

I became a critic because I wanted to write sentences like "This intense conviction of the existence of the self apart from culture is, as culture well knows, its noblest and most generous achievement." I didn't care about the canon, and I didn't care much about Communism, either. I just liked the way Trilling could turn a thought. I went to graduate school at Trilling's university, and I was trained in a department that retained the impress of his influence—at least in my field, which had been Trilling's field, Victorian literature. I was taught to think about literature as part of the history of ideas, and to believe that people wrote novels and plays and poems because they had something to say. I still think that this is true. I think that literature is a report on experience. I just don't think that it's a *privileged* report on experience. It is, as Trilling felt in his darker, anthropological moods, simply part of the cultural activity of making meaning.

I went to graduate school after the nineteen-sixties, when the age of heroic criticism was over, and thank God. There was a lot of righteousness, not to mention

self-righteousness, back in the days of *Partisan Review*. Taste has largely been liberated from politics. Most people don't use the language of approval and disapproval in their responses to art; they use the language of entertainment. They enjoy some things and don't enjoy other things. It just doesn't matter to them whether someone prefers Dreiser or James. This seemed to me to give literary criticism a lot less moral work to do. If there are bloody crossroads out there calling for the attention of the critical intellect, the novel does not appear to run through them.

Most of the intellectuals in Trilling's cohort were blindsided by the sixties, which is strange. Trained as Marxist dialecticians, they went into a panic when the screw took another turn. Trilling was stunned, for example, by the student takeover at Columbia in 1968: he had had no idea that the students were angry. He found the strikers' attitudes immature and distasteful; he thought that their demands were, as he put it in an interview in *Partisan Review*, "adventitious or symbolic." The students didn't really care about the issues; they simply wanted "the gratifications of *being political*." When he returned to his office in Hamilton Hall, one of the occupied buildings, he found written on the wall, evidently by a student who had failed French, the words "Fuck Bourgeois Culture" and "Lionel Trilling you pig." But he worked hard to mediate between the protesters and the university, and he was crushed when the administration called in the police and hundreds of students were beaten and arrested. "Sincerity and Authenticity," with its dire forebodings about the glorification of the unconditioned, came out of that experience.

Still, if people did glorify the unconditioned in the nineteen-sixties—if they had fantasies about social justice and personal autonomy, if they thought that universities could make themselves independent of a government whose policies they hated or that individuals could make themselves independent of a society whose values they regarded as sick—those were just the conditions of the time. One had to live with them, knowing that they contained within themselves the seeds of their own undoing. All push becomes pull someday. Criticism is about understanding how this happens. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

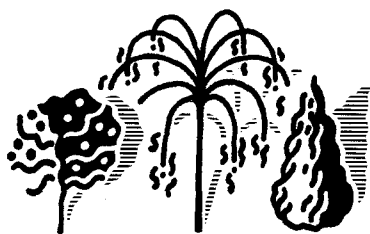
Indignation, by Philip Roth (Houghton Mifflin; \$26). In a departure from Roth's recent meditations on age, his new novel revisits the no less sexually frustrating experience of growing up. We are back in nineteen-fifties Newark, and nineteen-year-old Marcus Messner, the son of a kosher butcher, attempts to escape his father's stifling influence by enrolling at a college in Ohio farm country. Messner is a scholarly type, while his new classmates are an unfriendly bunch of churchgoing, beer-swilling louts. Stubbornly disregarding overtures of friendship from members of the school's only Jewish fraternity, Messner devotes his attentions to a troubled Gentile named Olivia Hutton. There's something of Portnoy in the masturbation-filled high jinks that follow, but Messner, fearful that he might "wind up a rifleman in Korea," is a far darker creation. Roth, blending the bawdy exuberance of his early period and the disenchantment of his recent work, demonstrates with subtle mastery the "incomprehensible way one's most banal, incidental, even comical choices achieve the most disproportionate result."

The Road Home, by Rose Tremain (Little, Brown; \$24.99). Tremain's protagonists are often faced with trials that have a fabled quality—a doomed romance in the seventeenth-century Danish court; a sex change in nineteen-fifties Suffolk—and her latest novel is no exception. Lev has left his mother and child in his village in Eastern Europe to seek work in London, bringing with him an E.U. passport, a handful of English phrases, and a small stash of cash and vodka. At first, he is repelled by what he finds: the shaved heads, the greasy food in disposable packaging, the women thrusting their breasts at him from the pages of the daily paper. But opportunities also push themselves forward in this cold new world; soon he is schem-

ing for a way to unite his future and his past. At once timeless and biting contemporary, this novel explores the life now lived by millions—when one's hope lies in one country and one's heart in another.

The War Within, by Bob Woodward (Simon & Schuster; \$32). This is Woodward's fourth book about Bush as a war President, and, if the previous one, "State of Denial," might have been called "Iraq: The Lost Years," the latest is all about rehab. Again and again, officials, diplomats, and military men stage interventions, to make the President address the impending collapse of his war. Woodward is maddened by Bush's impassivity ("Sure would be nice if this got better," the President tells Condoleezza Rice), and his lack of honesty with the public. Claiming that the Iraq surge has got credit that should have gone to other factors (including a secret program whose details he can't divulge), Woodward finds scant evidence that the Administration has a plan to exploit the recent fall in violence to achieve a political settlement or "victory"—a term that, when pressed, the President is unable to define.

Hurry Down Sunshine, by Michael Greenberg (Other Press; \$24.95). "On July 5, 1996, my daughter was struck mad," Greenberg writes at the start of a remarkable memoir. Sally, fifteen years old, after weeks of reading poetry and scribbling with mounting fervor, whirls through Greenwich Village possessed by a belief that people are born with genius but gradually lose it. As Greenberg watches her progress under psychiatric care, he is plagued by multifaceted guilt. He has a mentally ill brother and wonders if his genes are to blame. A freelance writer in a gentrifying neighborhood, he worries about his ability to care for Sally; he doesn't have health insurance and the family is turned out of a below-market-rent apartment. He mulls, by way of Schumann, Lowell, and Lucia Joyce, the long association of art and derangement and imagines that his literary preoccupations have influenced his daughter's. "Poor, poor Father," she says in the psychiatric ward. "Trying to get back your lost genius."



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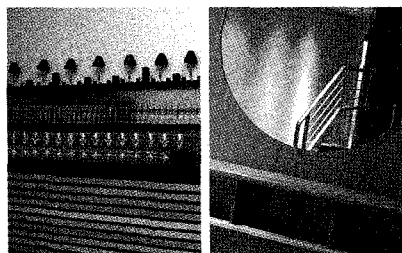
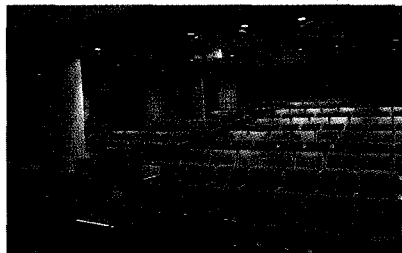
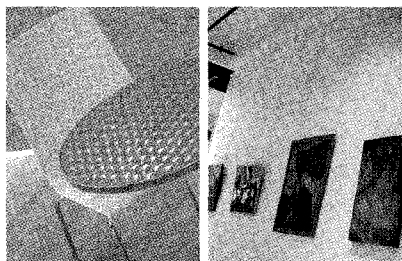
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THE THEATRE

STORMY WEATHER

"The Tempest" at the Classic Stage Company.

BY HILTON ALS

Has "The Tempest" become Shakespeare's black play? In the course of his writing life, the monumental poet created several black, or Moorish, characters: there's Othello, of course, and Aaron from "Titus Andronicus," not to mention the prince of Morocco from "The Merchant of Venice." But, for a number of scholars, race is essential to the plot in several of his other dramas as well, "The Tempest" principal among them.

At the start of the play (now at the Classic Stage Company, under the direction of Brian Kulick), Alonso, the king of Naples (Michael Potts), is on his way home from Tunis, where he and some members of his court, including his son and heir apparent, Ferdinand (the stellar Stark Sands), have just attended his daughter's wedding to an African. How Alonso and company end up shipwrecked near the "still-vex'd Bermudas"—then in vogue as one of England's more recent "discoveries"—is any navigator's guess, but without the storm that carried them there they would never have happened upon the island's inhabitants: Prospero (Mandy Patinkin), his daughter, Miranda (the increasingly brilliant Elisabeth Waterston), and his two familiars, a sprite named Ariel (Angel Desai) and his slave, Caliban (Nyambi Nyambi).

Almost at once, in this play about family, the arrival myth, and creation, Shakespeare introduces two states that artists must experience in order to produce their work: empathy and distance. Miranda—who, like an actress, feels language and lives it—complains to her father about the storm that he has conjured up, because she herself shares the distress of the men on board the ship. "O! I have suffered / With those that I saw suffer. A brave vessel / (Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her) / Dash'd all to pieces!," she exclaims. "O,

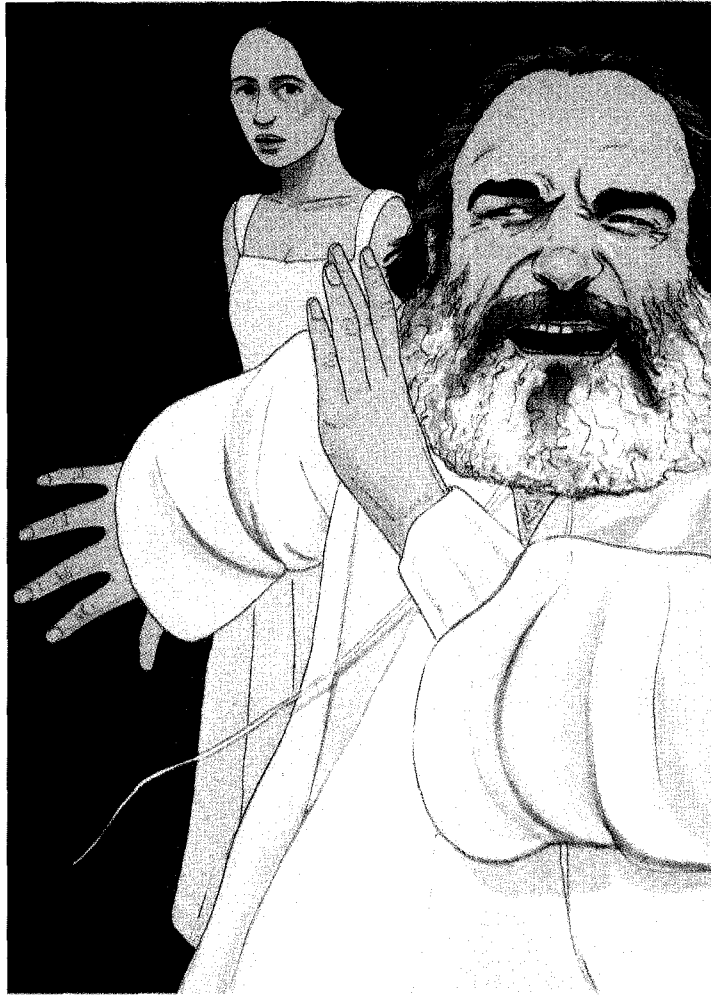
the cry did knock / Against my very heart." And it is here that Prospero steps in as Shakespeare's alter ego, instigating and controlling the spectacle that we are about to watch. Consoling Miranda, he tells her the truth about why he and she are living so far from home—because he, the rightful duke of Milan, was usurped by his brother, Antonio, whose nefarious political skills won him favor with the king of Naples. Prospero and Miranda were cast out to sea, along with Prospero's beloved books—"Me (poor man) my library / Was dukedom large enough," he says earlier. Eventually, they landed on the island they now call their home, where magic coexists with Prospero's philological impulses. In one of the more beautiful exchanges that Prospero and Miranda have during this reminiscence, he suggests to his child that the life he has provided for her has been a richer one than she would have had in Milan. "Have I, thy schoolmaster, made thee more profit / Than other princess' can, that have more time / For vainer hours, and tutors not so careful," he says. "Heavens thank you for't," Miranda replies.

Shakespeare finished "The Tempest" in 1611. Having written historical dramas, epic tragedies, and comedies about love, betrayal, and the ultimate ineffability of the human condition, in this play (likely the last that was wholly his own) he displayed a sweet acceptance of the imagination—of storytelling—as the common denominator among us, the faculty that links us all, or separates us from one another. The magnitude of Prospero's understanding—and the fact that he chooses to share it with a woman—is evidence of Shakespeare's unwillingness to stay within the confines of Elizabethan drama and of the society that produced it. "Why was the period of drama so short-lived, and

why was one person so immeasurably better?" W. H. Auden writes in his book "Lectures on Shakespeare." "Because of the provincial character of England: England was then a province, a hick country, compared with Italy, Spain, and France. . . . Dramatists therefore had to start from scratch. That's not always a good thing." Had Shakespeare been anything less than Shakespearean, "The Tempest" might seem like a strange bit of whimsy, but what the playwright takes on here is not just magic and sprites but the nature of colonialism.

It is this aspect of "The Tempest" that has drawn the most focus in recent years—particularly as it is telescoped in the complicated relationship between Prospero and Caliban, whose rage toward his master is so great that the threat of violence runs like an electrical current between them. When Prospero first arrived on the island, he treated Caliban—the child of an island witch named Sycorax—like a surrogate son. "When thou cam'st first, / Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me / Water with berries in't; and teach me how / To name the bigger light, and how the less, / That burn by day and night; and then I lov'd thee," Caliban says. Caliban showed his love by showing Prospero the island. In return, he claims, Prospero took his home from him. But Prospero counters with this: he could not trust Caliban with Miranda; he tried to rape her. And it is in this confusion of love, and love betrayed, that students of the play—viewing it through a postcolonial lens—detect a statement on the nature of the subjugation of blacks by whites. In her strong, lucid 2004 book, "Shakespeare After All," Marjorie Garber asks, "Why should the audience prefer Prospero the magician and his daugh-

ter Miranda over Sycorax the magician and her son Caliban?" The obvious answer is that Shakespeare does not make the latter relationship central to the drama—something that the poet and activist Aimé Césaire sought to correct in his 1969 play "A Tempest," which told the story from Caliban's point of view. But, like many "inspired by" works, Césaire's adaptation falters



Waterston and Patinkin as Shakespeare's stranded exiles.

on the first page, in this case with the stage direction: "Ambience of a psychodrama."

To focus on these elements of the play is to forget that the center of the drama, at least in this production, is Miranda's and Prospero's evolution from solitary exiles to loving citizens of the world. Mandy Patinkin became something of a star in the early eighties, when the De Niro-Pacino era—ordinary Joe becomes leading man and finds love with Meryl Streep or Michelle Pfeiffer—had already been established, and ethnic-looking lead-

ing men were still in fashion. Patinkin, who is Jewish, had an appealing quality on film in those years: sturdy, fighting his way around whatever obstacles society put in his way. But onstage he is odd to watch. In this production, he doesn't seem to connect with the other actors or with the text; he is isolated in the part. Waterston, for example—she has the kind of fine,

melancholy features that Ingres loved to draw—pays close attention to Patinkin as he speaks, but he barely seems to register her. And whenever he has a speech to deliver he bellows and races through it. Prospero is angry about the past, of course, but not all the time. It's difficult to tell whether this interpretation—which reveals little about Prospero's progression from spurned nobleman to wise artist—is due to Kulick's direction or to Patinkin himself, but you can certainly feel that Patinkin is more relaxed when he sings, or stands alone onstage addressing the audience directly, than when he is called upon to respond to the other performers. In short, one suspects that Patinkin is less an actor than a monologist, interested mostly in his song of the self.

The only actors who seem to connect are Waterston and Sands. In the lovely scene in Act III when Ferdinand professes his love, we're given a glimmer of what this production might have been had all the actors interacted: a kind of homage to forgiveness. Ultimately, Shakespeare was writing not about race but about the disavowal of loneliness—a theme that Auden took up in his astonishing poem based on the play, "The Sea and the Mirror," in which Caliban is transformed into a lonely young man in a single bed, dreaming of love in a syntax influenced by Henry James. ♦

GUNS AND LOVERS

"Appaloosa" and "Righteous Kill."

BY DAVID DENBY

Viggo Mortensen, square-jawed, dimpled, and fit, is a reserved man, but he's very present in the here and now (women tend to find him irresistible). Ed Harris can be spiritually intense and as remote as an Antarctic explorer. As actors, they have different kinds of appeal, but they're touching and funny together in *"Appaloosa,"* as two men who share a gift for silence. Virgil Cole (Harris) and his "deputy," Everett Hitch (Mortensen), are guns for hire in the Old West—longtime partners who communicate mainly by glances, nods, a few gnomic words, and a deepening stillness that can suddenly explode into violence. In 1882, they ride into Appaloosa, a New Mexico frontier town, and offer their services to the inhabitants, who are terrorized by a rapacious landowner and gang leader (Jeremy Irons). They may be for hire, but they fight on the weaker side, because it pleases them to do so. Noblesse oblige. Harris, who directed, wrote the screenplay with Robert Knott, from Robert B. Parker's 2005 novel, and they have structured the picture as a traditional Western. (There are echoes of John Ford, Howard Hawks, Fred Zinnemann, and many others.) The men are divided into protectors and predators, and the movie features a series of confrontations in which the moral issues are clearly settled. *"Appaloosa"* is not as ambitious as last year's *"3:10 to Yuma,"* which provided an expansive social portrait of the Arizona territory after the Civil War, but it has a distinctive humor, and a fresh character in Allie French (Renée Zellweger). At first, Allie seems to be the usual refined lady from the East: she wears silk dresses, pours coffee, smiles, and plays the piano (a little). But she shifts her loyalties among a group of men, some of them unsavory. A "bad" woman in town, the prostitute Katie (Ariadna Gil), understands her well enough.

"Mostly, the men worry about love," Katie says, meaning that women in the West have to worry about staying alive. Allie, looking for a protector, claims Virgil, breaking up the men's chaste, straightback-mountain love story. But the relation between man and woman, the movie suggests, will never be as pure as the male bond.



Viggo Mortensen in a Western directed by Ed Harris.

The Western has been stirring to life in recent years, not only because it offers an escape from the modern world but also because it offers an escape from modern movie technology. From the opening scenes, we know that *"Appaloosa"* won't be a fantasia in which the performers get tossed around by digital salad forks. Harris and his cinematographer, Dean Semler, shot the film near Santa Fe, and they calmly lay out a vast terrain of gray-brown buttes and valleys, with endless blue sky above. Harris respects the genre's pictorial grandeur, its regard for honor, its solemn conventions; this movie is grounded. Fear has sucked the life out of the sun-bleached town, with its adobe and wood build-

ings, its drab bar, its underemployed prostitute. (Hitch changes that last situation.) There's no law, no newspaper, and, when a trial has to be mounted, a judge brought in from out of town turns the affair into farce. The Old West, melancholy and lonely, comes off as a bleak and scary place.

There may be no law, but Virgil Cole certainly embodies authority. *"Appaloosa"* is, in part, a story about hero worship. Hitch, who narrates, tells us that he's been to West Point and fought in the Civil War and against the Indians, but he got out of soldiering, because it didn't allow for much "expansion of the soul." It's not clear how working for a gunslinger expands the soul, but Hitch is convincingly obsessed with his boss.

Mortensen, his eyes partly hidden under a round-brimmed hat, has a dandy's wide mustache and spadelike beard, and he cocks his head at odd angles and stares at Ed Harris's character as if he were a god in boots. Virgil is fearless, violent, indomitable; he's also a bit crazy, and Hitch takes care of him, reining him in now and then. Harris has an unreachable-American-hero quality; he's still the blue-eyed icon of resolve that he first revealed in his performance as John Glenn, in *"The Right Stuff"* (1983). The planes of his face seem lengthened under his black hat. He's clean-shaven, a sign of fanaticism in a country of scraggly beards.

Of all the cinematic genres, the

MARY ELLEN MARK/COURTESY WARNER BROS.

Western has stayed closest to its silent-movie roots. Gary Cooper never said much in his cowboy roles, though as he got older his aura of tragic stoicism became better than speech. Clint Eastwood, in his spaghetti-Western days, spoke so slowly that he could just as easily have etched his sentiments in stone. "Appaloosa" turns the inarticulateness of the Western hero into an elaborate joke. Virgil, a self-made man, carries a small volume of Emerson around with him and puzzles out "Self-Reliance," but, at work, in the middle of some tense moment, he depends on Hitch to help out when the words don't come to him. "Commiserate," Hitch says, filling in the blank when Virgil offers mock sympathy to a mean cowboy. Even Jeremy Irons's gangster pitches in. "Sequestered?" he asks with annoyance, naming his own situation when Virgil holds him in jail for trial. Harris's view is that the small-town Old West is struggling to realize itself: it's a civilization that hasn't been articulated yet; it has values but no words, no goods. In a strange and wonderful scene, local Indians, after a raiding party on Allie and some friends, exchange her captured corset for a horse, on the assumption that such an oddity must be a thing of great value.

Virgil is pleased by Allie's refinement, though Hitch, of course, is discomforted by the way she pulls Virgil away from him. When it turns out that she takes her corset off more than she should, the two men are baffled; to them, women are either wives or whores, and Allie is a little of both. Harris conveys the confusion of the two

with considerable delicacy. As a woman of mixed morals, Zellweger has a touchingly desperate quality, as if a smile would make all her betrayals go away, but her part is thinly written—there isn't enough script for her to create a full character. In all, "Appaloosa" is good as far as it goes—everything in it feels true—but I wish that Harris had pushed his ideas further. At the end, the movie reverts to traditional Western themes: loyalty, obligation, the defining duel. During that last gunfight, you can feel the air going out of your response, though the formal closure of the movie—the ritual push on to a new frontier, new challenges—offers its own kind of happiness.

Acting together as aging N.Y.P.D. detectives in "Righteous Kill," are anything but quiet. Indeed, they send up a howling wind of boasts, profane stories, lewd jokes, denunciations of criminals, mutual expressions of admiration and reassurances of their own virtue as cops. I've heard more enlightening dialogue in an Upper Broadway bar at closing time, but the two go at it furiously, as if raw humor and mawkishness were somehow the soul of humanity. The movie, written by Russell Gewirtz and directed by Jon Avnet, sends the men racing around town (though parts were shot in New York, there's not much feel for the place) in one of those plots about a serial killer who leaves clues behind. This killer eliminates bad guys—pimps, child murderers—and deposits poems at the scene of his crime. Suspicion is thrown

on one character, but it turns out that an elaborate trick has been played on us. This ruse, however, brings us not the elation of seeing a mystery solved but the chagrin of having been cheaply taken in.

Trying to cover the holes in the story, Avnet, who also made the execrable "88 Minutes," also starring Pacino (how could he have worked with this director *twice*?), chops the episodes up into fragments, runs dialogue over unconnected visual material, and ends sequences before their meaning is made clear, and, through it all, the stars keep banging away at their lines like two subway cars that don't quite fit on the tracks. The movie is hectic, exhausting, and baffling. It's an embarrassment, and not just because Pacino, with his pouchy eyes, looks much too worn to be chasing killers, and De Niro is patently too heavy-spirited for the lovely, teasing Carla Gugino, with whom his character is having some sort of "hot" sadomasochistic affair. (They stage mock rapes in her apartment.) It's an embarrassment because the two greats carry enormous amounts of movie lore around with them, and we keep waiting for the moods to settle down enough for some of the old associations to resonate, and it never happens. Pacino, the cutup, lets his voice go high and throws his arms up, while De Niro, scowling and pulling down the corners of his mouth, seems permanently disgusted. It should be a sign of life that they haven't turned into softies, but if they're going to keep playing tough guys they have to work with better material than this. ♦

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VOLUME LXXXIV, NO. 30, September 29, 2008. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 11 & 18, June 9 & 16, July 7 & 14, August 11 & 18, and December 22 & 29) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Drew Schutte, vice-president and publishing director; David Miller, associate publisher; Terese Cunningham, advertising director; Norman M. Miller, advertising director; Maria Tenaglia, advertising director; Suzanne Reinhardt, director of finance and business operations; Daniella Wells, associate publisher of creative services and marketing; Jacqueline Cinguina, executive director of marketing and integrated strategy; Alice McKown, executive director, creative services; John Rice, executive creative development director; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Debi Chirichella Sabino, senior vice-president and C.E.O.; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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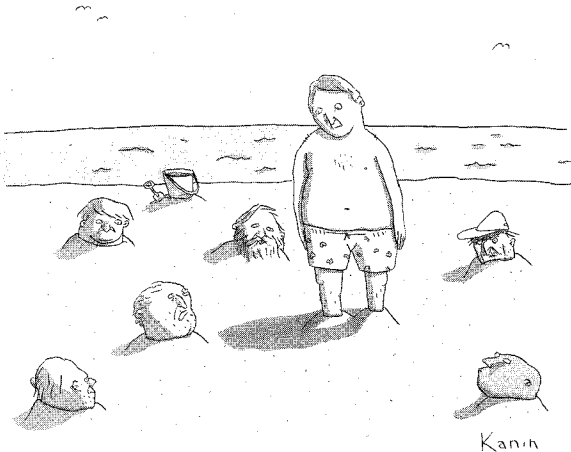
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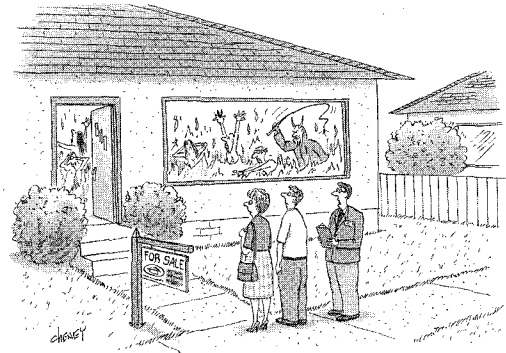
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Robert Mankoff, must be received by Sunday, September 28th. Finalists in the September 15th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the October 13th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You got that? Three bottled waters, two sodas, one coffee, and six straws."
Robin McCauley, Newport News, Va.



THE FINALISTS

"The heating system is pretty old but very reliable."
Shawna Bryan, Andover, Ohio

"I strongly recommend that you read the fine print on this one."
Phil Schatz, New York City

"The seller is extremely motivated."
Mariam Erenburg, New York City

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST





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